The ASI Andaman and Nicobar Island Tribe Series

The Sentinelese

T.N. Pandit

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

THE SENTINELESE

T. N. Pandit

The ASI Andaman and Nicobar Island Tribe Series

Series Editor : Dr K.S.Singh

The Onge

The Shompen

The Great Andamanese

The Sentinelese

The Nicobarese

The Jarawa

THE SENTINELESE

T. N. Pandit

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on behalf of the
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A Note on the Series

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the homeland of probably the most primitive communities belonging to the Negrito racial stock, only traces of which are now left in the coastal areas and parts of the mainland. These communities, small in number, and sensitive and isolated, have been under stress all over South-east Asia and the Pacific. Their problem has to be seen in a wider perspective. The Indo-Mongoloid group of the Nicobarese, relatively sturdy and resilient, have accepted the challenge of the change and have even prospered and multiplied. Another Mongoloid community, the Shompen, semi-nomadic and living in small, scattered settlements, still shy away from outsiders, but they are reportedly somewhat better off than the Negrito communities of the Great Andamanese and Onge whose numbers have sharply dwindled; nor are they as remote as the Sentinelese and the Jarawa; the latter have only now started responding to administrative overtures. Even so, the Shompen deserve to be treated with equal care and sympathy.

The earliest literature on the islands belongs to the genre of colonial ethnography. The first study which dates back to 1790 is in the nature of a descriptive study of the islands. It was from 1869 that the ethnographic study of tribal communities started and came to cover geography, languages, ethnography, pre-history, etc. The well-known works of this category are : F.J. Mouat, *Adventures and Researches among the Andaman Islanders* (1863); M. V. Portman, *History of Our Relations with Andamanese* (1889), vols. 1 and 2; E.H. Man, *The Nicobar Islands and Their People* (1933), *Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands* (1932) and *Andaman Nicobar Gazetteer* (1908); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Andaman Islander* (1922). Except for the last work which marked a breakthrough in anthropology, all the other works were of a general nature abounding in interesting descriptions of the exotic. Some important work was done in connection with census ethnography from 1921 onwards. However, it was only after Independence that serious research was undertaken by Indian scholars on a long-term basis. The most important agency involved in it was the Anthropological Survey of India. Its Port Blair Office, established in 1951, has produced about 250 publications including monographs, articles and reports. The Survey also built up an ethnographic museum as part of its regional office with an excellent collection of artefacts and photographs. Students

and teachers belonging to departments of anthropology have also been visiting the islands for the study of tribal communities.

The survival of all tribal communities (except the Nicobarese) is the key issue in the islands. Since 1901 their population has been declining. The Great Andamanese are facing the threat of extinction because of the incidence of high infant mortality caused mainly by diarrhoea, malaria and tuberculosis. The decline of their population has been a cause of justifiable concern. In recent years, while some satisfaction can be derived from the arrest in the decline of their populations in terms of percentages if not numbers, it is only a negative satisfaction. Their number has become very small. The maintenance of ecological balance is intimately linked with the survival of these communities which are unique in their formation. They must be preserved and helped to develop in their own way at all cost. The four Negrito communities, and even the Mongoloid community of the Shompen, must be encouraged to develop a will for survival which they have been losing over the years. This can be done only by showing a genuine respect for their culture. They remain unique in the plurality of cultures in our country of which we are justifiably proud. They also possess a profound knowledge of their ecology and concern for its preservation. Survival of these groups and preservation of ecological balance are interconnected.

Following the Prime Minister's visit to the Islands in 1987 and in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office, the Anthropological Survey of India initiated action to put together a strategy of survival for the endangered communities and drew up a plan for bringing out a series of publications including monographs on six tribal groups in the islands. This involved updating of material and generating new material, particularly for the Nicobarese in all their islands. Over the years the scholars of the Survey have been studying these communities and collecting available data on the social, morphological and genetic characteristics of these populations.

This monograph forms part of a series that Seagull Books has undertaken to publish on behalf of the Anthropological Survey of India on a crash basis. They deserve our thanks for doing so. I have every hope that the monographs will be received well by scholars, researchers, administrators and planners interested in the study and development of these communities.

K.S. SINGH, SERIES EDITOR
DIRECTOR GENERAL
ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

Foreword

Of all the tribal societies in India and the rest of the world, the Sentinelese whose population is estimated at 80 to 100, are perhaps the most isolated and hence the most untouched culturally and biologically. They are true hunter–gatherers who live on the small island of North Sentinel, from which they derive their name, only a few hours boat journey from Port Blair in South Andaman. Since the British days the island has been their exclusive home. There is no trace of administrative presence there, due to the sensitivities of the Sentinelese, who have all along been highly suspicious of outsiders, perhaps because of some unpleasant experiences. However, occasionally official parties have paid short visits to the island carrying gifts of coconuts, bananas, some iron pieces and so on. These the Sentinelese have accepted, if dropped ashore at a respectable and safe distance from where they may be standing.

However, in spite of such minimal contact, it has been possible to record some observations of their physical type, lifestyle and culture. T.N. Pandit was the first professional anthropologist to land there, in March 1967. He made important observations on their settlement pattern and material culture. Subsequently, he has made many more visits to these people between 1974 and 1989. Some other staff members of the A.S.I., too, have visited them in recent years.

In the years to come we are bound to gain further insight into Sentinelese society and culture. Let us hope that in the process of shedding some of their doubts and suspicions about us they are not made to lose something of the vitality and viability of their own existence as social-cultural and biological beings.

The present volume is a personalized account by T.N. Pandit, a first-hand study of his observations and experiences, based on his visits to the Sentinelese. Pandit has had valuable experience in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. He has been there for about 20 years and has been associated with all important research and policy initiatives.

K. S. SINGH

Preface

On Wednesday 16 March 1966, a bright, sunny day in Calcutta, I embarked on *M.V. Andaman* to sail for Port Blair to join as Assistant Anthropologist at the Andaman and Nicobar station of the Anthropological Survey of India. After a comfortable and interesting voyage—an altogether new experience for me—our ship approached Chatham Jetty at Port Blair on the island of South Andaman. The day was a bright and warm Sunday, 20 March.

It was a sight for sore eyes: the greenery, the golden sunshine, the swaying palms, the brightly painted timber houses dotting the slopes, the shimmering blue water of the sea, reflecting a picture of breath-taking beauty. I was enchanted and charmed, even though, as a Kashmiri I had grown up amidst the scenic beauty of the Himalayas.

I devoted my time to studying the literature, and generally familiarizing myself with the ethos and ambience of the Andaman Islands. On 16 January 1967, I was asked to take over as Officer-in-Charge of my office.

In my student days I had studied Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* as part of our M.Sc. syllabus, and later had even taught it to my students. This was my basic introduction to the Andaman Islands: the rest of it had been rather vague. I was dismayed to note that the 'Andaman Islanders' described by Radcliffe-Brown in his celebrated book had almost disappeared from the scene and the few survivors were living miserable lives scattered all over South, Middle and North Andaman islands doing odd jobs. The 1961 census had listed 19 individuals, though my predecessor Kochar told us that actually there were 33 in 1964. These were the first people I met in and around Port Blair. One little old lady would ask for alms near a tea shop while the kids would tease and chase her all over the place. It caused me lot of pain to see their plight, while the literature showed them to have been a brave, valiant and very clever people. I delivered a radio talk on them at Port Blair in October 1966 and tried to speak of their glorious past in contrast to their present degradation and misery.

In early 1967 I paid a short visit to the Onge in Little Andaman at their Hut Bay camp. They were friendly and looked happy. Friendly contact with them had been made 92 years ago by M.V. Portman, a British administrator, following a series of bloody encounters. The Onge were still the sole inhabitants of the islands but plans had been

drawn up for its colonization and part of the virgin forest was soon going to be cleared for this purpose. The Onge were very much a viable society, though their population had dwindled to a mere 129 by 1961 (Census figures) from an estimated 1000 or so in the mid-nineteenth century. As a result of the closer contact, the Onge had become addicted to tea and tobacco, expecting these as gifts. Luckily, opium had not been introduced to them. Nor had their women been exploited. The Great Andamanese, it may be recalled, had suffered heavily on both these accounts.

In April 1967 I was invited to join an official expedition to North Sentinel Island, in which the officers of the Andaman Administration and Indian Navy had joined. I was the only anthropologist on the team, and the first ever to have visited the island. The surviving 33 Great Andamanese were all that remained of the ten original tribes occupying Great Andaman (South, Middle and North Andaman and other smaller islands). They had been the first people to be contacted and befriended after a lot of blood had been shed in skirmishes, fights, and battles over several years. The Onge were befriended later, in 1885. The Sentinelese, however, had till then had only a limited, distant contact with the settlement. The situation continues to be the same even today, the only difference being that official parties have been visiting them more often since 1967. This situation of relative isolation is very influenced by geography. North Sentinel Island is surrounded by deep sea. Nobody else lives there and so the island remains the exclusive habitat of the Sentinelese. Except for occasional visits by official gift-dropping parties, nobody else visits these people. In fact, North Sentinel is officially a reserved tribal area and entry there, except for official purposes, is forbidden to all.

On my first visit to the island in 1967 we saw the Sentinelese watching our boats and ships from the shore. We were a large party. But as we landed, they hid themselves inside the forest, though they continued to keep watch. About a kilometre inland we observed their settlement with 18 huts, fires burning and their artefacts lying around. They kept their distance and remained hidden, coming out again on the beach only when we had returned to our boats after leaving some gifts at their settlement. (Some of the things must have been quite useless and irrelevant to them.) Our visit had created a short-lived commotion among the Sentinelese but we had failed to make any serious impression on their minds. They remained aloof, a bit puzzled and very suspicious of our actions and real intentions. In 1989 the situation is still basically the same.

My first contact with the Jarawa, in the summer of 1968, was due to an accident. In village Kadamtala, a settlement of Bengali refugees in Middle Andaman, a group of Jarawa had paid a night visit to pick up

iron implements for making iron arrow heads, and bunches of bananas. Some villagers woke up and, suspecting burglars, shouted loudly. The whole village woke up and managed to capture three Jarawa boys after a scuffle. The boys were brought to Port Blair under police escort and kept under friendly observation. The Negrito tribes have been part of the myth and folklore of the settlement since the mid-nineteenth century, especially the Jarawa. The general public was very excited and a whole lot of them were eager to watch them or at least have a glimpse of them. For me it was a great experience to have the privilege and the wholly unexpected opportunity of observing these members of the so-called 'hostile' Jarawa at close range. It was very interesting indeed to learn a bit about their language. They were quite sharp and intelligent, and could communicate through gestures. But most of the time they looked thoughtful and morose, though they cheered up on being taken outdoors to meet more people.

So, within about two years of my posting, I had gained some familiarity with the ground-level situation of the few surviving members of the once dominant Negrito tribes. It gave me a lot of food for thought.

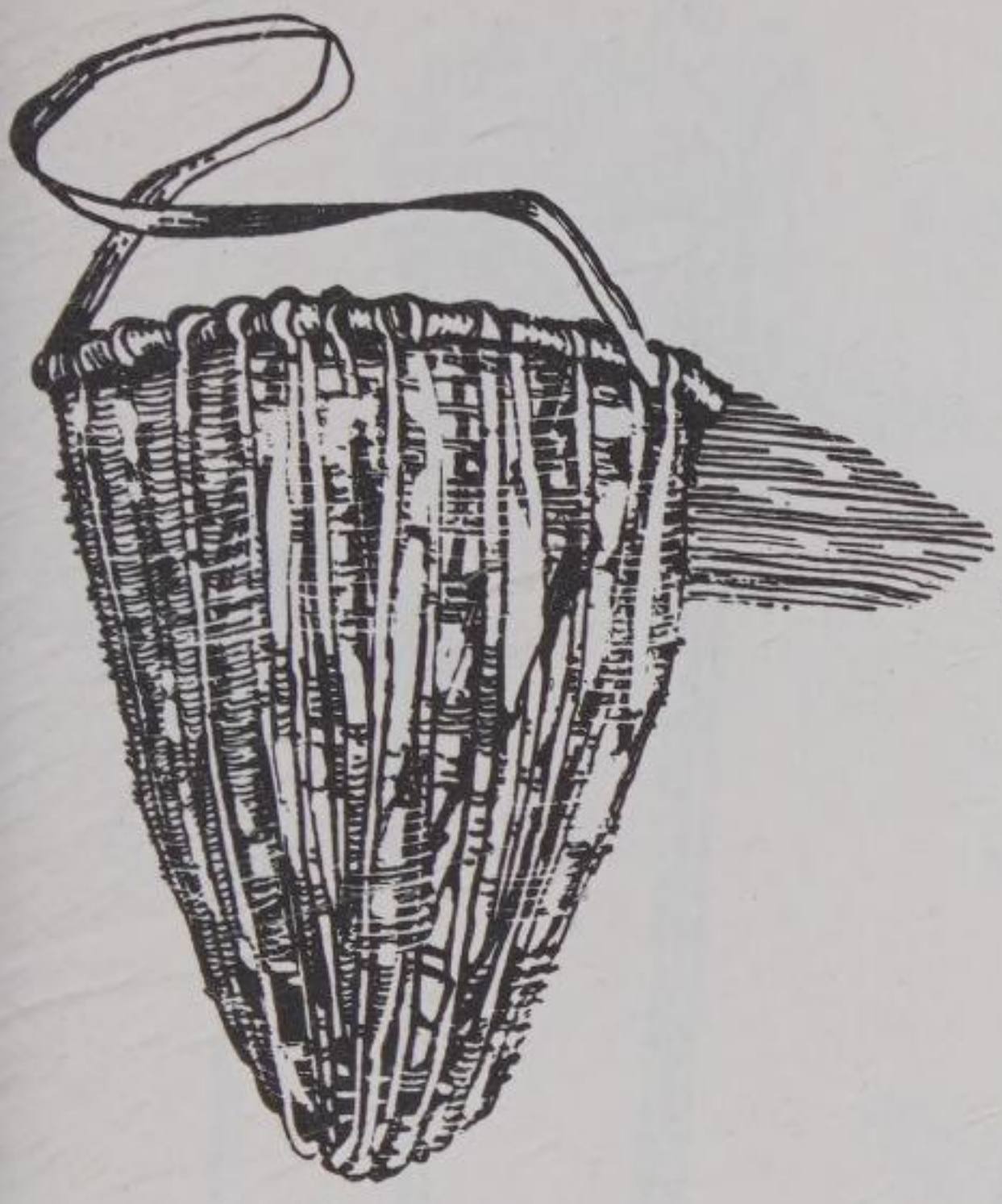
In 1968 I submitted a formal proposal and scheme to the Chief Commissioner for the resettlement of the surviving Great Andamanese. By 1969-70 the scheme had been implemented. A new, exclusive settlement had been constructed at Strait Island and all the Great Andamanese taken there. In March 1969 I joined an ICMR team for a health survey of the Onge.

In October 1969 I assisted the Sundaram Committee, Government of India, to draw up a report with recommendations for the welfare of and development work among the four Negrito tribes. Between 1969 and 1974, as a result of these recommendations, the scheme for renamed and more systematic gift-dropping operations in the Jarawa areas was launched, and I worked in close collaboration with the A & N Administration. I joined police gift-dropping parties and surveyed Jarawa reserve areas with a view to finding ways and means of developing friendly contact with the Jarawa. As a policy the use of force for any reason except in extremely dire circumstances had been ruled out. As a result of several years of patient effort and the Jarawas' own judgement, the first truly friendly contacts with them were made in early 1974. In April 1974, I was amongst the first people, and the first anthropologist ever, to meet them in their area. They had hidden away their bows and arrows as a sign of friendliness. We spent some very happy hours with them. In the years that followed, between 1974 and 1989, I have paid a series of visits to those areas.

My deep and personal commitment to the Negrito tribes, to their survival as viable and happy communities and to their welfare as

respected communities in the total setting of the A & N Islands and the country, is based on humanitarian and professional concerns. It took birth and evolved in the course of my two-and-a-half decades of personal association and involvement with them. I have been not only a witness but also a participant in the series of changes and vicissitudes they have undergone since 1966. The present account of the Sentinelese is an outcome of this experience of and involvement with the Negrito tribes.

T. N. PANDIT



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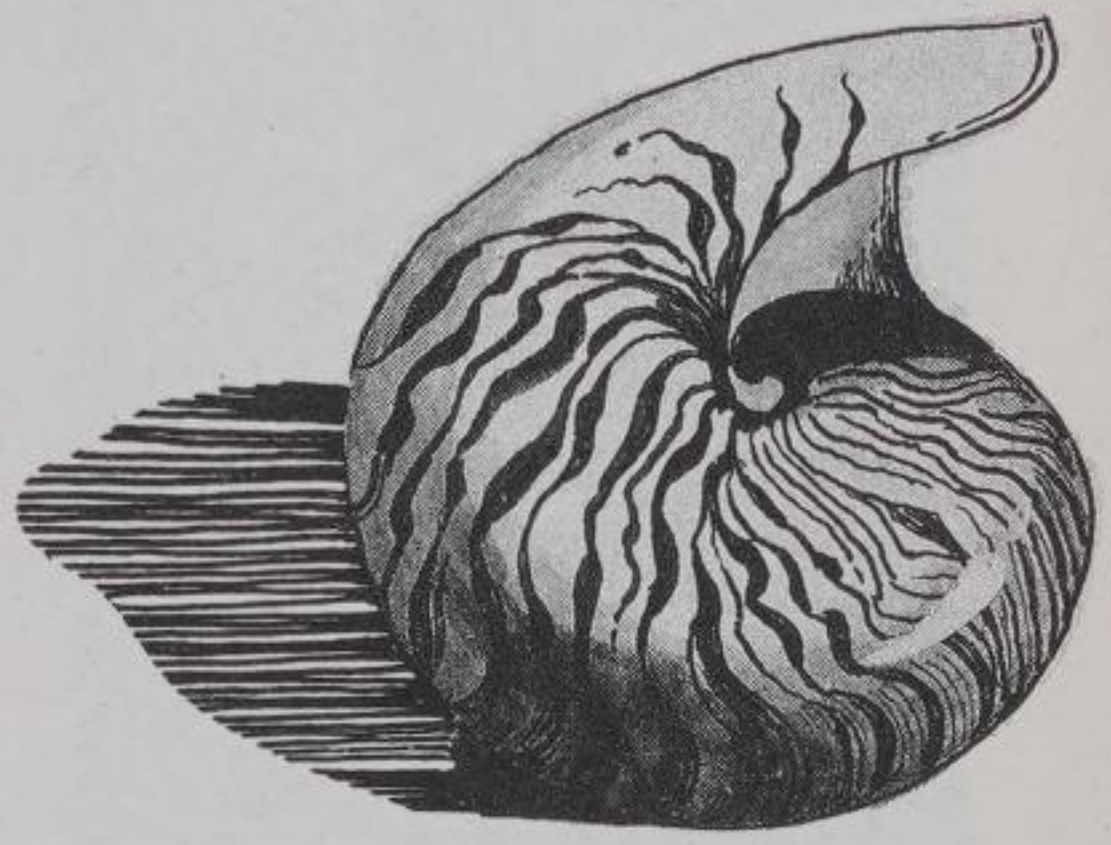

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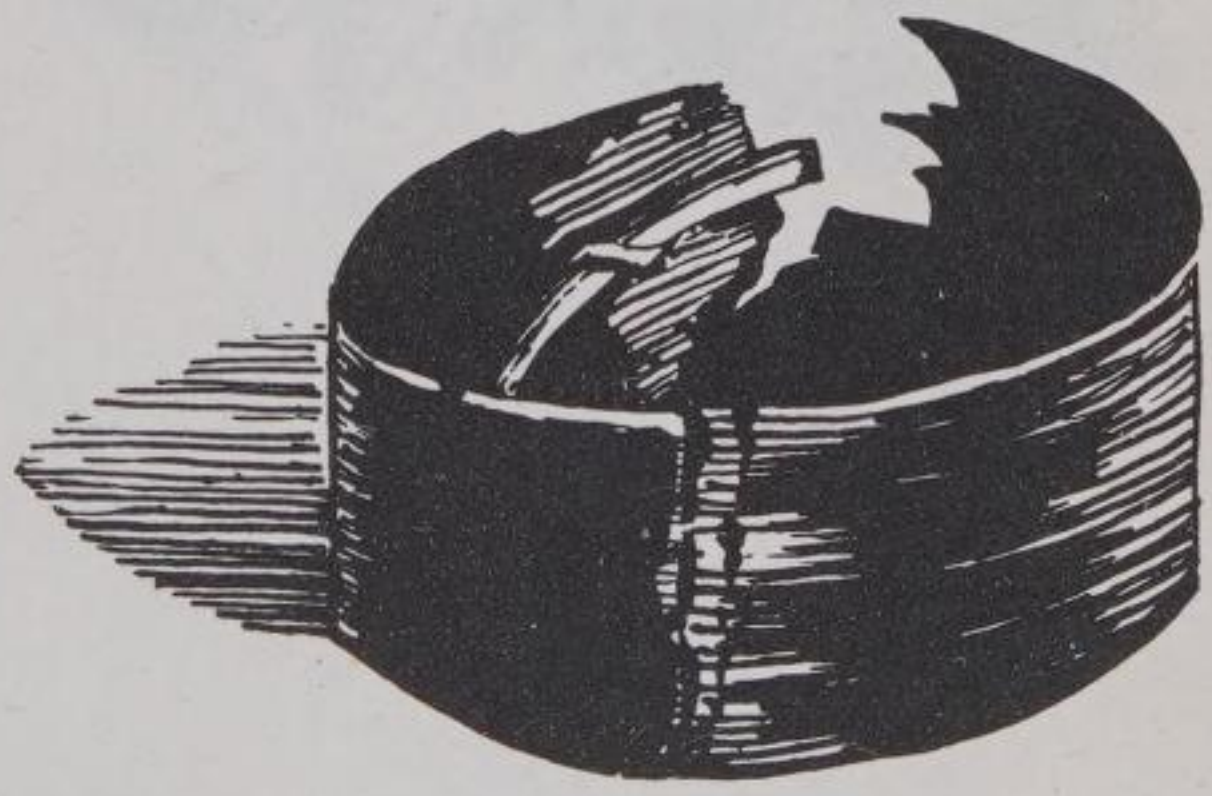

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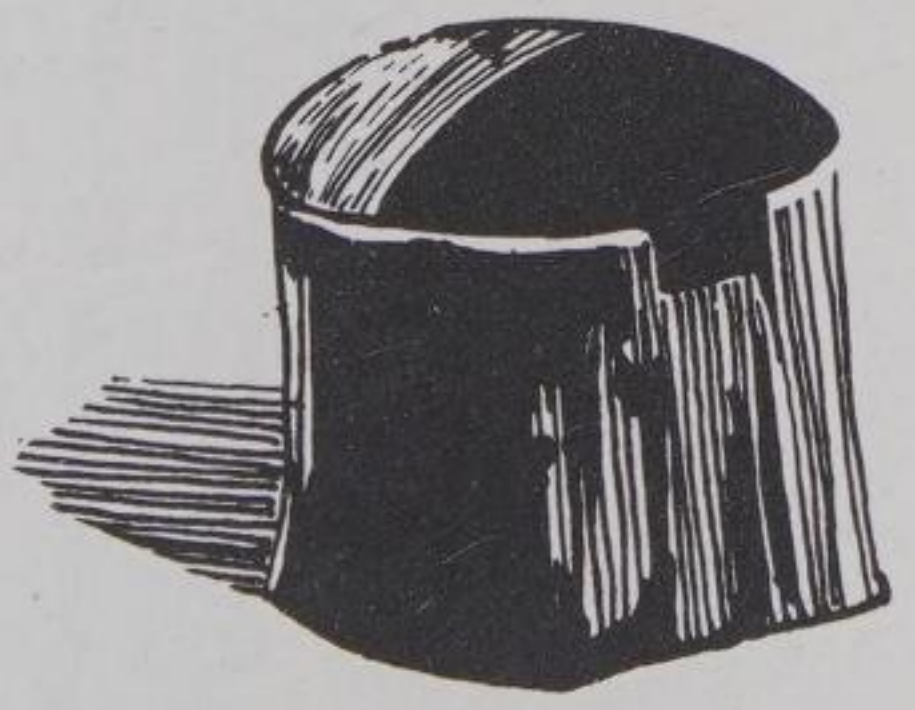

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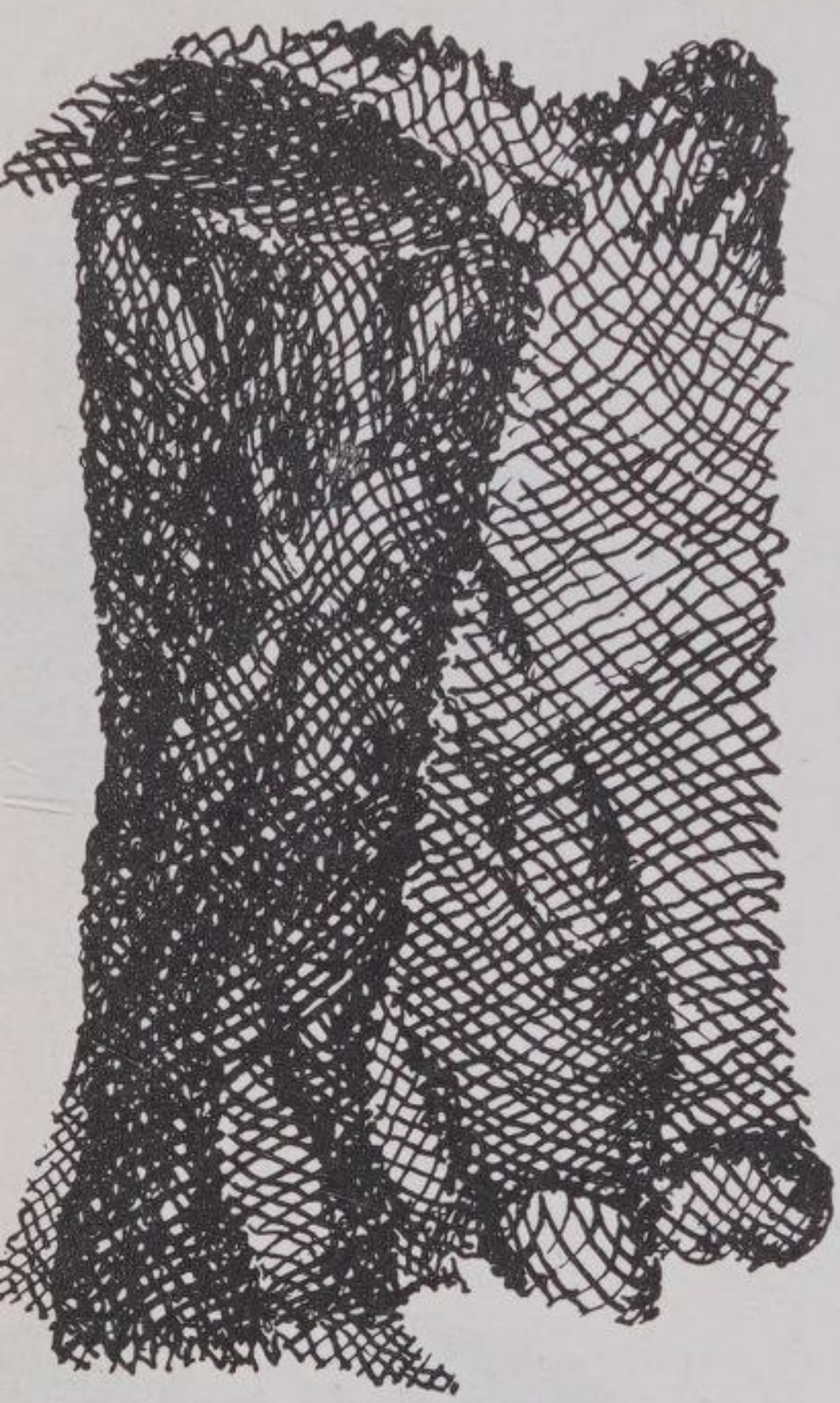

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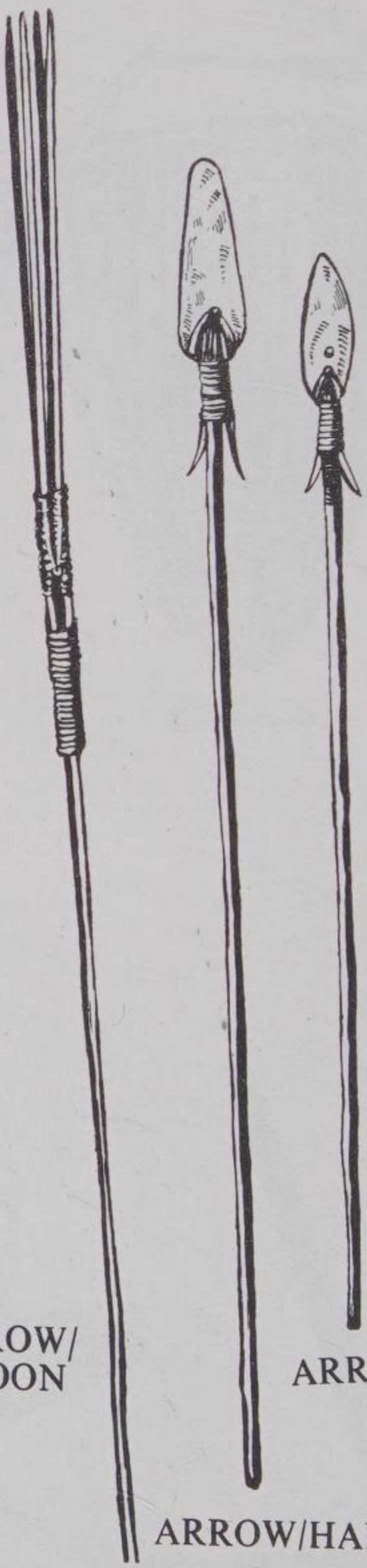

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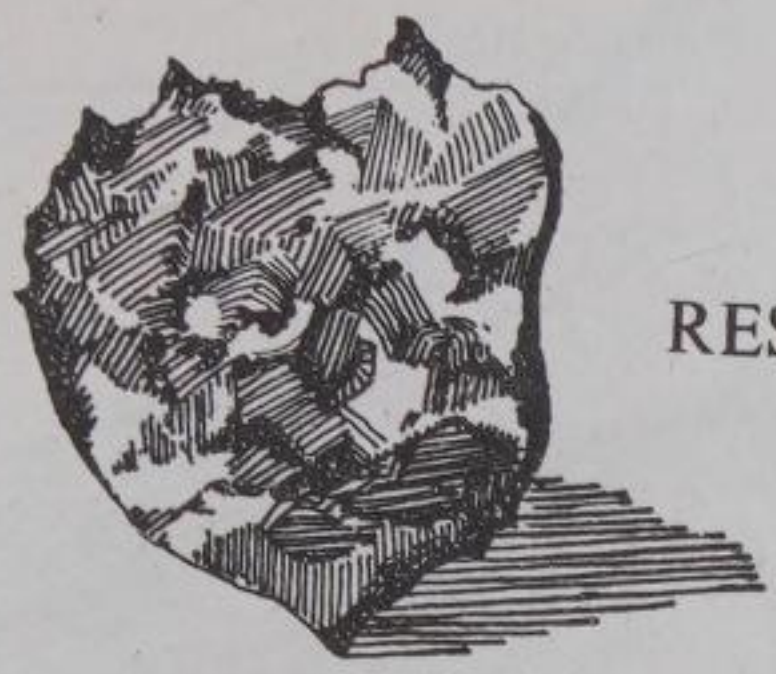

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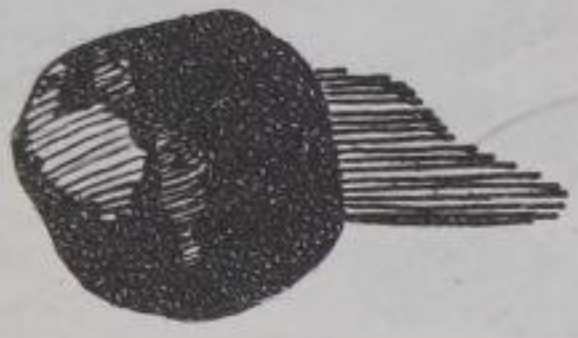
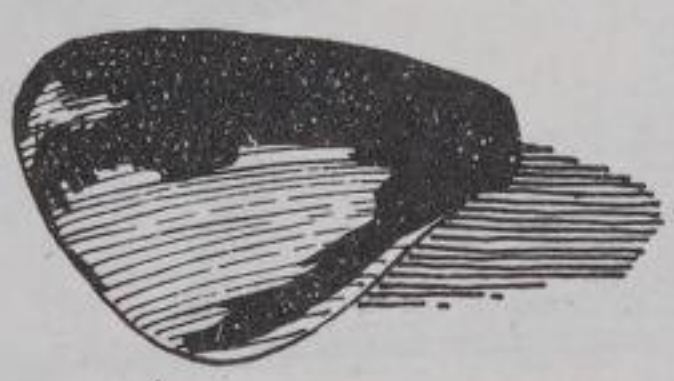
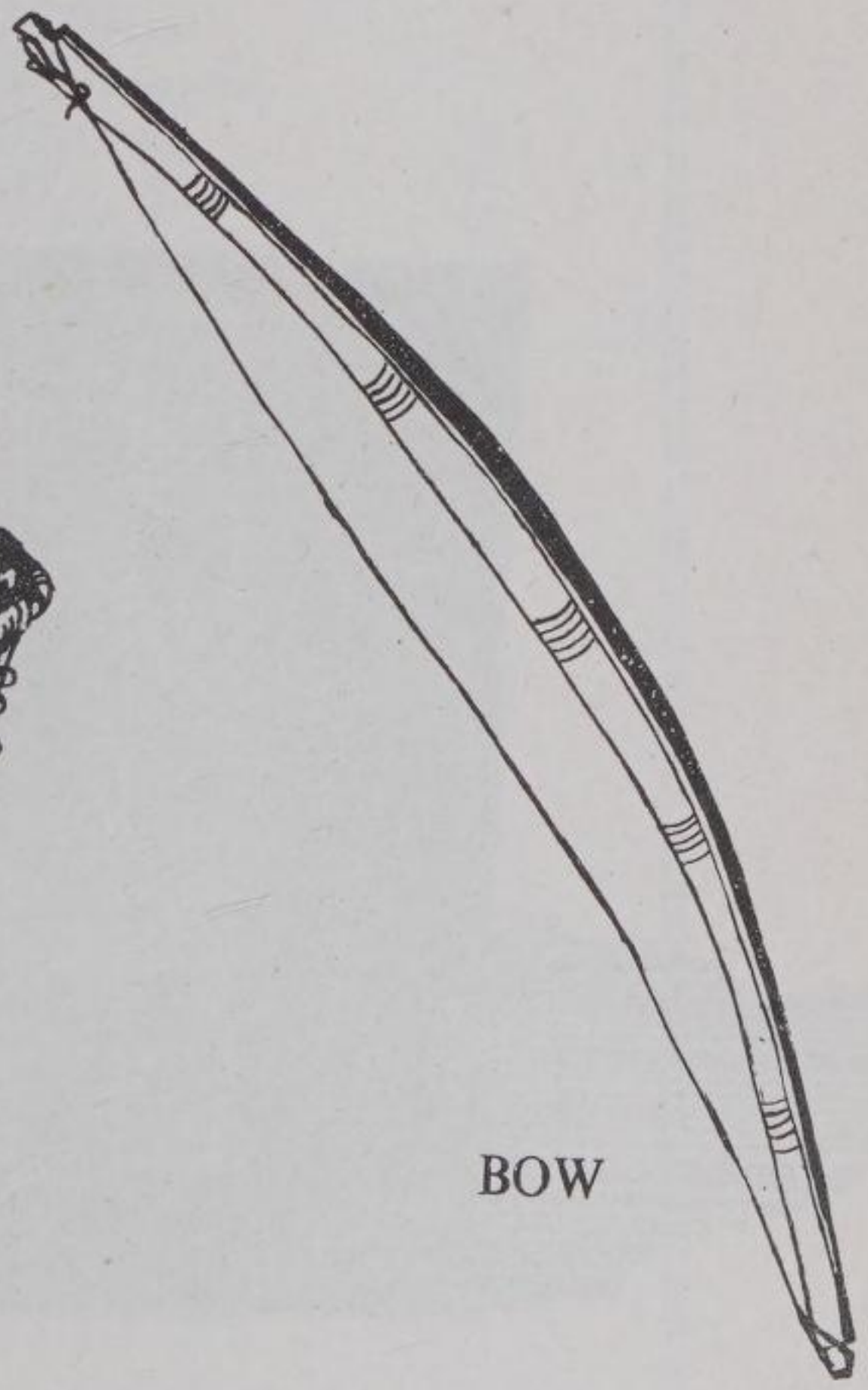


GRINDING STONE



HAMMER STONE

BASKET



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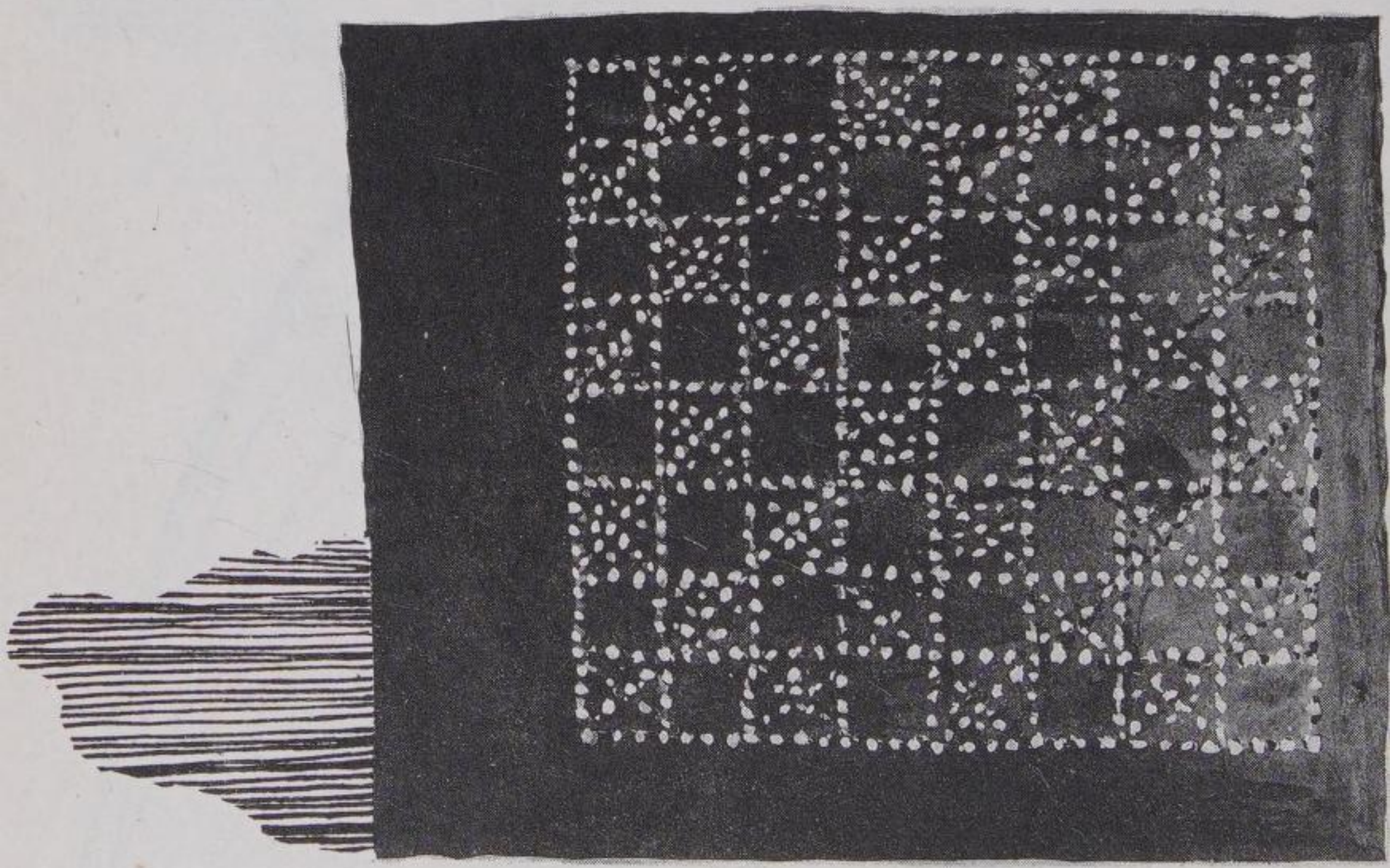
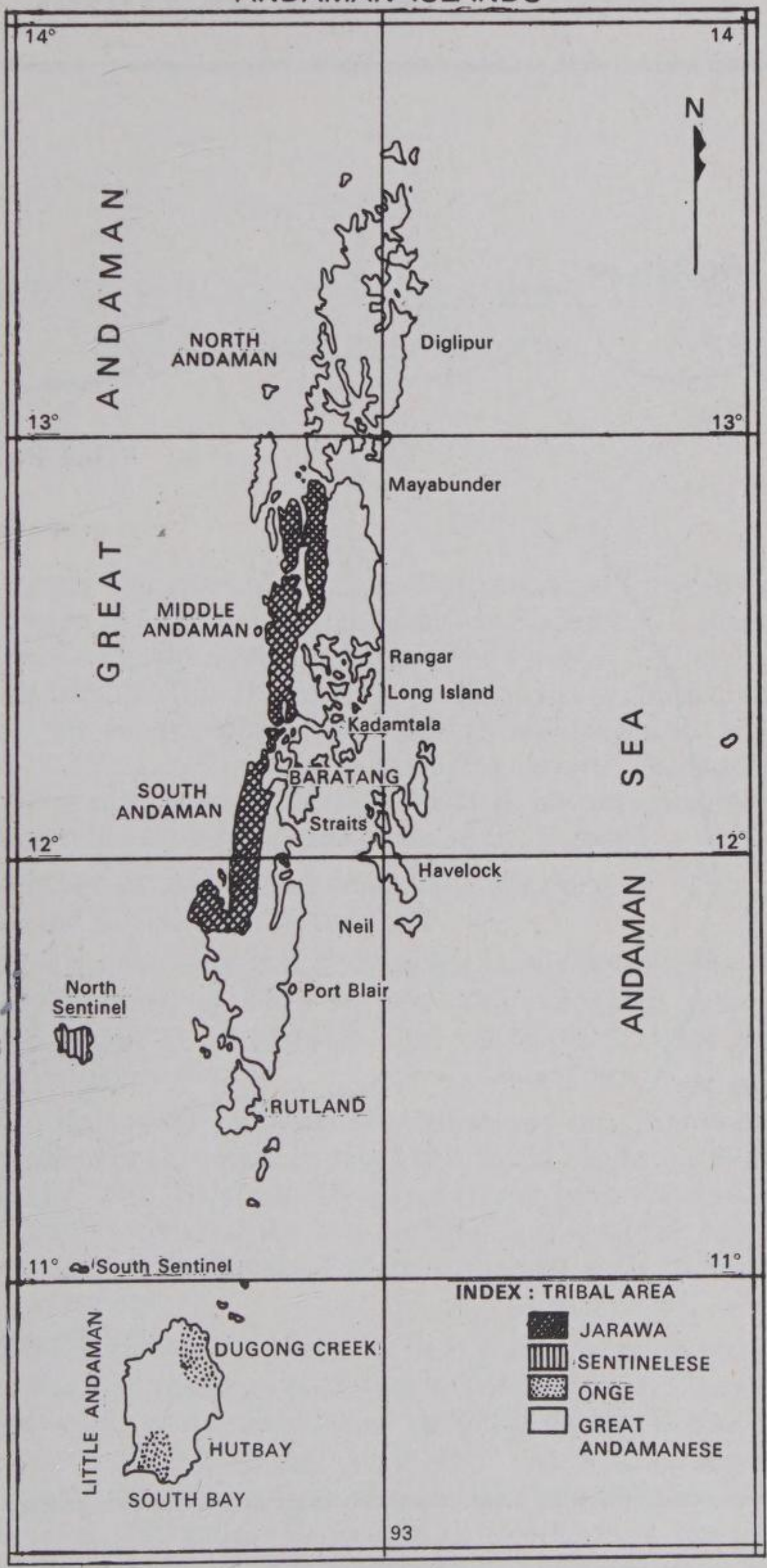
PIG SKULL



WOODEN "CHESS" BOARD

ANDAMAN ISLANDS



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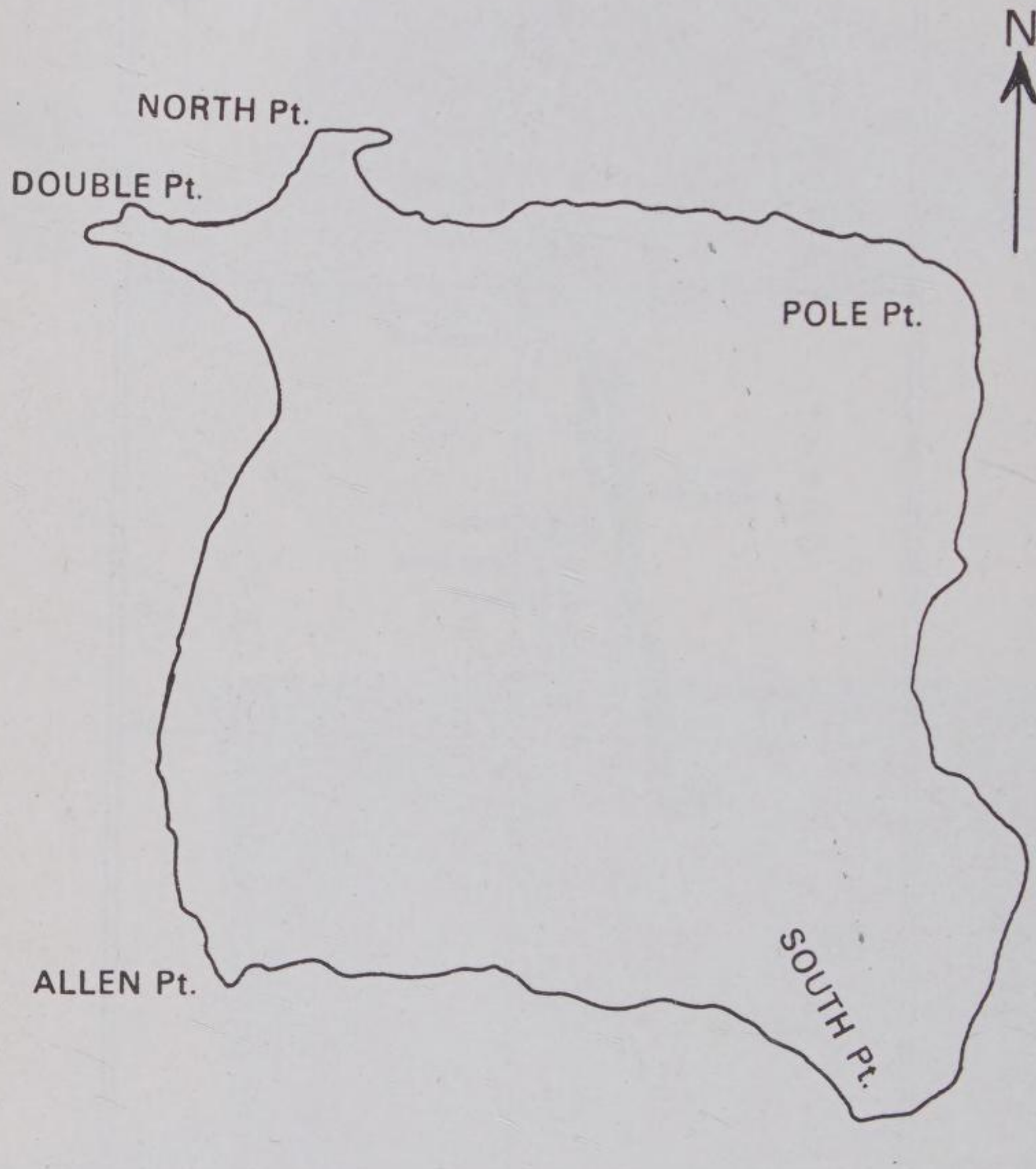
ISLAND NORTH SENTINEL



NOT TO SCALE

CHAPTER ONE

Andaman Islands : Geography, History and the Negrito Tribes

Geography

Spread over nearly 600 miles of sea in the Bay of Bengal between Cape Negrais in Burma and the Indonesian island of Sumatra is a chain of some 300 islands known as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also called the Bay Islands. This chain of islands skirts the peninsular coast and forms a single geographical system of partly submerged mountains that is part of the Arakan Yoma range extending between the Burmese mainland and Sumatra. Most of the smaller islands are uninhabited. The larger islands numbering only a dozen or so are all inhabited.

The islands are situated within a quadrangle formed by 10° N and 14° N latitude and 92° E and 94° E longitude.

The total area of the islands is 8249 sq km of which the area of the Andaman group alone is 6408 sq km. The Andaman group is constituted by over 200 islands and islets while the Nicobar group consists of some 20 odd islands.

The terrain is generally hilly and the hill ranges run from north to south. The highest peak, called Saddle Peak, has a height of 2400 ft. and is situated in North Andaman. The larger islands have very irregular shore lines, forming some of the best harbours in the world. Most of the islands are lacking in perennial sources of water such as streams, rivers, lakes, or springs.

One striking feature of the islands is their greenery, as they are all covered with thick evergreen tropical forest. The islands are singularly lacking in large carnivorous mammalian types. The climate is generally warm and moist tempered by cool sea breeze. The distance between Calcutta and Port Blair is about 780 miles and that between Madras and Port Blair is about 740 miles. Cape Negrais in Burma is 120 miles away from the nearest island, while Sumatra is 340 miles away from Great Nicobar, the last island of the Archipelago.

History

The earliest references to these islands, it is claimed by some authors, are in the *Ramayana*, the great epic. The origin of the name Andaman has been traced to Hanuman, the monkey god of Hindu mythology. The Malaysian word for Hanuman is Handaman and the latter have given this name to the islands, perhaps believing the aborigines to be the descendants of the monkey god. It must be remembered that Malays have for many centuries used these islands for piratical activities and traded in Andamanese slaves (Census of India 1931:5).

The islands have been mentioned by Ptolemy (2nd century), the Chinese monk I T'Sing (7th century), two Arab travellers (9th century), Marco Polo (13th century), Friar Odoric (early 14th century), Nicolo Corti (early 15th century) and numerous other travellers during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. These accounts indicate that the islands were always feared and avoided. It seems that crews of wrecked ships or those who came in search of fresh water or to take shelter from stormy weather were generally slain and their ships looted and destroyed.

One important result for the Andamanese of this contact with foreign ships and people was that they—a hunting and food gathering people—learnt the use of iron. For centuries now they have been using iron to make their tools.

The Settlement

It was in 1788 that Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor General of British India, sent Lt. Colebrook and Lt. Archibald Blair to survey these islands for the purpose of colonization. The idea was to establish a penal colony, to check the activities of Malay pirates and to ensure the safety of British ships and crew plying this route.

In 1789 a free settlement was established in Port Blair (then Port Cornwallis) on Chatham Island. In 1972, the settlement was shifted to the present Port Cornwallis on the north-east coast for its 'vastly superior harbour'. This decision was disastrous as the place proved very unhealthy; so much so that the settlement had to be abolished altogether.

It was in 1857, after the Indian Mutiny, that the British Government decided once again to establish a penal settlement at Port Blair. The first prisoners were brought here in 1858 under the charge of Dr Walker.

The coming of the British and the Indians was resented by the Andamanese and they fought and resisted the settlement for many years. It took the British a lot of time and effort to pacify the major groups of aborigines and to win their goodwill.

The islands (including the Nicobars) passed under Japanese occupation during the Second World War for more than three years,

from 1942 to 1945. The penal settlement was finally abolished in 1945 and the colony was declared a free colony. In August 1947 the Andaman and Nicobar Islands became part of the Indian Union.

The Aborigines

As far as can be traced the Andamanese (the tribes of the Andaman) are known to have been living on these islands for ages. It is difficult to say anything about their origins. However, it may be said that they belong to Negrito stock and they have considerable ethnic affinity with two other aboriginal communities, namely the Semangs of Malaysia and the Aeta of the Phillippines. But it has not been possible to establish any linguistic relationships among them, as the latter have forgotten their own dialects, having taken up the languages of their dominant neighbours.

The Andaman Islands and the Negritos had remained very isolated for many centuries before the British conquest, as might be imagined in view of the geographical conditions. However, there are reports that the Malays had used them 'for piratical purposes and for trade in Andamanese slaves. These slaves found their way to the courts of Siam, Cambodia and Indo-China for many a century, thus naturally bringing about the deepest distrust and hostility on the part of the aborigines to all visitors to the islands' (Bonington 1932:5). The Negritos would, in turn, kill the crew and sailors of alien ships that would take shelter or get wrecked near these shores. However, neither the Malays nor any outsiders came to settle here before the British.

The motive for British occupation of these islands was to forestall any possibility of a similar action by rival European powers, and to make the area safe for British shipping on this important sea trade route. The islands were surveyed in 1788, and the first settlement was founded in 1789. But it lasted only till 1796. The second settlement was established in 1858 following the great Indian rebellion of 1857. This settlement has continued to flourish. Today the total population of the Andaman and Nicobar islands is estimated at about 250,000 and of this the Negrito population consists of a mere 400. In 1858 the Negrito population was estimated to be about 5000 (A & N Gazetteer 1909:2).

The Great Andamanese

A community of 28 living in an officially constructed settlement on Strait Island off the east coast of Middle Andaman since 1970, (Chakravarty 1977), they are the sole survivors of the twelve or ten original tribes of the Great Andaman area described by Man (1883) and Radcliffe-Brown (1948). Close contact with them started in 1858 when,

for the second time, a penal settlement was established at Port Blair.

The small tribal community that is being referred to today as the Great Andamanese is but the remnant of the 10 or 12 tribal communities that once held sway over the largest part of the Andaman archipelago (from North to South Andaman) and lived independently following the ancient hunting and gathering mode of subsistence. Or, to use the terminology of Marshall Sahlins, they were the original affluent societies (Sahlins 1972:41). They seemed to have ample food and plenty of leisure, with limited desires and needs. They fought and resisted the occupation of their lands at every step and thus were able to delay the expansion of the settlement area somewhat. During April and May 1859, they even made three organized attacks on convict parties and the Port Blair settlement, but the damage they caused was limited. At the time of the third, most major attack they had been betrayed by an escaped Indian convict, Doodhnath Tiwari, who had been living with them for more than a year as a friend (Mathur 1968: 73-75).

However, the superior force eventually won. By stages the proud and brave tribals were cowed and won over and all their islands and forest lands were opened up to occupation and exploitation by outsiders. But the price they paid for friendship was heavy indeed. By the turn of the century their population had been reduced to a fraction of what it had been estimated as in 1858 (see Table 1). The original destruction occurred when many warriors got gunned down by the invaders. However, greater damage was done by disease, 'the secret weapon of civilized man'. The following observation in the Gazetteer of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1909:2) is noteworthy—'The cause of diminution of the population is infectious and contagious disease, the result of contact with an advanced civilisation. Epidemics, all imported, of pneumonia (1868), syphilis (1876), measles (1877) and influenza (1892) together with exposure to the sun and wind in cleared spaces, the excessive use of tobacco and overclothing, have been the chief means of destroying them. Disease has worn down the actual numbers of the tribes and has apparently rendered the union of the sexes infructious in many cases.

It may be noted here that it was never the policy of the British Government in those days or later to deliberately cause the destruction of the Andaman Negritos. On the other hand, the instructions were to treat them with kindness and to use the minimum of force only when unavoidable. But in pursuance of the basic policy of conquest and expansion, violence and disturbance on a major or minor scale continued for many years, as there was mutual suspicion and distrust.

The destruction caused by disease, too, was unintended. It has been seen all over the world that highly isolated and small forest-dwelling tribal communities have proved to be highly vulnerable to the new

disease-carrying viruses and bacteria introduced among them through close contact with other civilized people coming from distant ecological regions. And then the medical facilities, too, were inadequate to meet the demands of the settlers and the tribals both.

Table 1

Showing estimated/actual population of Andaman tribes from 1901 to 1990

Tribe	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1978	1980	1990
Great Andamanese	625	455	209	90	23	19	24	25	29
Onge	672	631	346	250	150	129	106	97	98
Jarawa	585	114	114	70	50	500	250	250	200
Sentinelese		117	117	50	50	500	100	100	80 100

Sources : Census reports (1901–1961) and Anthropological Survey reports. All figures below the dotted lines are only estimates. Estimate of their total population in 1858 (start of the penal settlement) was about 5000 (3500 Great Andamanese and 1500 Onge–Jarawa–Sentinelese group).

Mouat (1863:3-4) who was one of the important British officers to have visited the islands soon after the second settlement was established makes frequent references to the 'savage' character of the Andamanese. 'The inhabitants of Andamans,' says he 'have always been considered one of the most savage races on the face of the earth, whom civilisation has yet found it impossible to tame.' This was the general opinion, at that time: not very surprising in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the stated British aims was, therefore, to civilize and tame the 'savages'. For this purpose the administration established what were called Andamanese Homes. Here they were kept and taught 'good manners', made to wear clothes, use a fork and knife, learn new trades and handicrafts and also the English language. Close contact with the British and the Indians here led to the spread of all the highly infectious diseases that destroyed them. Sometimes they ran away from the Homes and spread the disease inside the forests, causing great havoc.

The Andamanese were, in turn, attracted to the new artefacts, iron, food articles and opium and tobacco, that the settlement had to offer

them as gifts, or sometimes as loot. But at the same time they were too inclined initially to pay the price of easy access to these items: a fair degree of subjugation to the outside people. So, after all the battles, fights, petty quarrels and punishments suffered and the gifts and blandishments received, they were eventually brought under control. The process must have been greatly helped by the rapid loss of numbers that they suffered.

By the time Radcliffe-Brown did his fieldwork among them (1906-1908) the ten tribes were only a shadow of what they must have been before the occupation, whether one thinks of them as social, economic or political entities. Their separate identities, at one time well defined in terms of geography, culture, language dialect, and so on, were getting gradually blurred. In fact, some tribes had earlier not even been aware of each other's existence because of the distances separating them and a lack of communication.

During the last 80 years their population has kept on dwindling alarmingly. The sharp demographic decline naturally caused cultural and social disorganization leading to a state of anomy. There was rampant exploitation of their women by the non-tribals, resulting in cross breeding. Some of the men and women lived almost as serfs with the Indian or Burmese settlers prior to 1969. At least one Andamanese woman living with a Burmese migrated to Burma in 1966 along with him.

In 1970, the Andaman and Nicobar Administration, on the advice of the author, decided to settle the scattered surviving Great Andamanese at Strait Island with government assistance. There they live now as a new-born community, representing five original tribes and consisting of 13 males and 15 females (see Table 2 for details). Their houses have been built by the Administration, which takes care of all their basic requirements, including food, clothing, health care, transportation etc. Besides, each family gets a regular monthly cash allowance. They do a bit of trapping and hunting and fishing and attend to the piggery and the plantation provided to them (Chakraborty 1977, Pandit 1975).

The social worker stays there permanently. A compounder, a doctor and other Government officials visit them occasionally. Anthropologists also keep paying them visits. Some non-Andamanese labourers too come here periodically, depending on work requirements. Some degree of social cohesion and identity seems to have grown, though there are slight tensions which occasionally lead to minor quarrels. It is a far cry from the old days of total degradation. There is an effort to get them involved in productive work to create a sense of pride and self-respect and to obviate the need for free allowances, except where unavoidable.

The Onge

A tribe of 98 people, the Onge are divided into two major communities at Dugong Creek and South Bay (about 40 km apart) on Little Andaman Island. Until 1967 they were the sole inhabitants of the island but the situation underwent an upheaval when it was opened up to large-scale settlement by outside people, including Bengalis and other Indians, and also the Nicobarese. The Nicobarese settlement is quite close to the South Bay settlement of the Onge, and other Indian settlements are spread out in the area between Hut Bay (the headquarter and jetty area) and the Dugong Creek settlement of the Onge.

The closer contact with the Onge goes back about 100 years. In 1867 the Onge killed the crew of the ship *Assam Valley* when they went ashore on Little Andaman. A punitive expedition was subsequently sent out. It led to serious and intense hostile encounters between the Onge and the expedition. 70 Onge were reportedly killed and 5 British soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross. However, after a series of attempts, first contacts were made in 1885 but it was only by 1886-1887 that the first definitely friendly contacts were established by Portman. A party of the Onge was captured at sea, and brought to Port Blair. All members were later released with presents (Bonington 1932: 16-17).

Since then, especially after 1958, government officials, including anthropologists, medical personnel, administrators and others have frequently visited the island. The Onge, too, have paid occasional visits to Port Blair over these 100 years and the relations with them have been quite friendly. Sometimes small groups have been brought to Port Blair mainly with the purpose of meeting important visitors from the mainland.

Till 1967 the island of Little Andaman was solely inhabited by the Onge, but with the decision to open up the area for the settlement of outsiders and to exploit its rich resources, many development projects were initiated or put into operation. (Pandit and Bose 1977: 132-140). These revolve round clearance of forest land for agriculture and plantations, utilization of timber resources etc. The Onge population today is barely 98 as compared to 672 estimated in 1901 (see Table 1). If the earlier estimate was correct, the reason for the sharp decline to one-sixth of that figure in 80 years or so is the same as in case of the Great Andamanese, that is, death through warfare and mainly through disease (Bonington: 1932:19). Portman (1888, 1899) has recorded that on several visits in 1886-87 he had noticed incidences of syphilis, scurvy and elephantiasis as well as malaria and bronchitis. It is possible that these infectious diseases were spread among the Onge even before the arrival of the British, by the Malays who had been visiting these

islands for birds' nests and native slaves, as we have noted earlier.

During the last 18 years the Onge have for the first time been living face to face with an alien population of about 3000 people and have had to surrender vast tracts of their island for the use of the settlers. The Onge resource area is still quite large (about 350 sq km) as the development work has somehow been slowed down, partly deliberately, but they have had to give up the Hut Bay area which is now the settlement headquarters. This was traditionally hunting and collecting ground, so their traditional movements and arrangements have been disturbed. There is also the tremendous psychological impact of being hopelessly outnumbered on an island which was entirely and exclusively theirs until 1967.

There has been considerable consciousness at various official levels at Port Blair and New Delhi of the difficulties being caused to the Onge. Therefore, the original development programmes have been pruned down. Also, parallel efforts to help the Onge adapt themselves to the changing conditions have been carrying on through some welfare programmes.

Their settlement at Dugong Creek has been redesigned and rebuilt at government cost. Even the huts have been redesigned. A medical team along with a team of social workers is posted there. A new plantation has been started where fruits, roots and tubers, bananas are grown with the idea that the Onge will learn the technology themselves and soon take it over on their own. An electric generator has also been installed. Some Bush Police personnel were also posted there for some time for the protection of the Onge from outsiders. Some new techniques of fishing are also being taught to the Onge. One Onge youth has been nominated as a member of the Territorial Council to represent all the Andaman tribes, to give a psychological boost to their sagging morale.

The feeble efforts aimed at helping the Onge to learn to read and write Hindi and simple arithmetic were just geared to the thinking that they will be ready for many basic changes in their lifestyle through a gradual process. In the meantime the Onge are becoming sharply conscious and aware of many new consumer goods and want to have money and resources to buy them or to get them free.

To help them in this process of readjustment a number of specialists are stationed at their Dugong Creek settlement on a regular basis. Others pay occasional visits. Sometimes the outsiders outnumber the Onge present there. What must the Onge be thinking about all this!

However, the Onge society is still a viable one and has never reached the abysmal depths to which the Great Andamanese were pushed by their circumstances. But from an independent, self-reliant and a virile society it is gradually becoming more and more dependent (without any parallel compensating factor to minimize the impact) and docile vis-a-

vis the dominant society. Could we describe this as development and progress in the real sense?

The Jarawa

The present estimate of the Jarawa population is 200 (against 250 to 300 during the previous decade and a half). They inhabit about 700 sq km of the western coastal and forest reserve of South and Middle Andaman Islands. For 116 years (1958-1974) they maintained a stance of defensive/offensive isolation from Port Blair and other non-tribal settlements. However, the ice was broken in February 1974 when they received a small official gift-dropping party with friendly gestures. Contact with them is still of a limited nature. Except for receiving occasional small gifts of coconuts, bananas, pots and pans, iron pieces and simple tools, they faithfully follow their traditional hunting–gathering lifestyle. However, they have had an active, and quite often mutually hostile interaction with the non-tribal settler populations all along their territory for 125 years (1858 onwards). They have also had some contacts with the first settlement (1789-1790) in South Andaman.

In 1858 when the permanent settlement at Port Blair was established the settlers naturally came into conflict with the Negrito tribes that lived in and around the place and all over South Andaman. This was Negrito land and they were being forcibly evicted from the land of their ancestors. Besides, the forests, which had sheltered and sustained the hunting and food gathering Negritos since the beginning of time and where their spirits had resided all along were being ruthlessly destroyed. These strangers who had descended on them with such suddenness, had also gone about their work of destruction with considerable swiftness.

The shock was physical, cultural and mental. They found that their world was being turned upside down by external elements. The Negritos who lived in South Andaman at that time were the Great Andamanese tribes and the Jarawa. While the outsiders remained busy dealing with the more numerous Great Andamanese with a policy that sought to blend blandishment with punishment, the more shrewd Jarawa had time to ponder over the unforeseen and ominous situation. In the meantime they kept their battle of survival on with occasional forays into the settlement, positively discouraging any intruders in and around their territories. The settlers cunningly exploiting the old differences over the territory between the Great Andamanese and the Jarawa, succeeded in turning the fury of the former away from themselves and towards the Jarawa. The Great Andamanese were given liberal supplies of iron for making arrows, rifles and guns to kill the Jarawa, who, sensing great danger from both sides and fighting a defensive battle on two fronts gradually migrated from the eastern parts to the southern and later to the

western parts of South Andaman.

Ultimately, they had to fan out to the western region of Middle Andaman. Most probably they would have been smoked out from there also but for the fact that the Great Andamanese were in the meantime paying a very heavy price for their close contact with the settlers. Their intimate contacts with the latter had brought many epidemics in their midst, killing large numbers of them. In a few decades their number had dwindled to a fraction of their original strength of about 5000 or more (see Table 1). As already noted, only 28 of this tribe survive today in a specially reserved area on Strait Island.

Though the large-scale destruction of the Great Andamanese had given some respite to the much harassed Jarawa, it had also given them considerable food for thought. A hunting and food gathering community may be lacking in superior technology but they are very close to their environment and understand its nature. Even the slightest changes in it are noticed because their very survival depends on the continued integrity of their environment.

The Jarawa had been used to seeing the Great Andamanese all around them in the South, Middle and North Andaman forests. But gradually they had become more and more scarce after their close association with the settlers. The Jarawa must have decided then, guided by their observation and instinct, that in order not to meet the same kind of fate they had to keep their distance from strangers. Thus, a policy of active isolation with respect to the new settlements was adopted and is being largely followed by them even to this day. Can we say that they have been wrong? They have survived in a better and healthier manner than both the Great Andamanese and the Onge have done, after close and friendly contact with us.

After 1947 the policy of sending punitive expeditions and arming and inducing other people to harass the Jarawa was, wisely, given up. But the Jarawa life has been disturbed in many ways all the same. With the expansion of settlement areas, their hunting ground has shrunk further, their access to water sources has been endangered and intrusion by unauthorized hunters and fishers has affected their natural sources of food supply. The forest extraction operations and the road construction of the Andaman Trunk Road within and along their reserve areas with heavy machinery, elephants and men moving around and causing disturbance and destruction has posed a continuous threat to them. The establishment of Bush Police out-posts all along the Jarawa reserve has also been an irritant, judging by various incidents that have been caused around these places. In spite of all these factors, the situation today is much better than it was at any time during the British and Japanese occupations. During the Japanese occupation of the Islands (1942-1945) during the Second World War the Jarawa settlements were machine

gunned following the death of a Japanese soldier in their area. The negative aspects of the situation have also been relieved to some extent by the gift-dropping operations, good and kind treatment given to the three captured Jarawa boys in 1968 and to the Jarawa groups in South Andaman since 1974 and the absence of punitive expeditions which used to cause much damage to the life and property of the Jarawa.

The Jarawa are being induced to appreciate and accept a policy of coexistence. They have only occasionally raided nearby settlements to pick up iron tools (for making arrows) and eatables like bananas, coconuts, etc. These stray incidents might occur under some provocation, which however minor from our point of view, obviously seem serious or disturbing to them.

By and large, the Jarawa have been generous of heart in their dealings with us. In February 1974 they took the initiative in breaking the century old-isolation and a large group of theirs showed themselves to a gift-dropping party and made friendly gestures. This incident inspired and encouraged the government to respond actively. In early April that year the Jarawa came forward to meet official parties. The author was intimately associated with this work which carried gifts and goodwill for them. Since then (1974-1989) we have had many friendly meetings with this small group on the west coast of Middle Andaman, though other groups in South Andaman still remain rather isolated. Side by side, the so-called 'Jarawa incidents' have also continued as a result of possible provocations and pressures and as such the situation continues to be delicate.

The recent efforts to extend contact with the Jarawa in Middle Andaman to South Andaman have succeeded. The immediate purpose is to avoid the incidents involving sporadic killing of either the Jarawa or the workers and government officials employed on public projects in these areas or the ones adjoining to them. Such incidents have been reported as recently as 1989. Also, there is the hope of opening up channels of verbal communication with a view to putting across the message of peace and friendship to them. They have to be convinced that we do not mean any harm to them but want to know them better.

It is interesting that this thinking is similar to the one espoused in 1858 when a captured Andamanese was taken to Calcutta. 'It was expected that through him the aborigines could be persuaded to understand that no harm was intended to them. A knowledge of manners, customs and the language of the Andamanese was to be gained through him' (Mathur 1968:67). This is a very interesting coincidence indeed.

While this thinking is going on, there are also occasional and sometimes strident vocal demands from the settlers close to the Jarawa for early construction of Andaman Trunk Road and for permission to

cultivate the land in the vicinity. These demands are also voiced through political parties and leaders. Of course these have not been accepted—but who can say about the future ?

The Sentinelese

The Sentinelese are the sole inhabitants of North Sentinel Island off the west coast of South Andaman and are probably one of the few highly isolated human communities in the world today. They are, by all evidence, a true hunting–gathering society with considerable reliance on sea resources. The estimates of their population during the last 50 years have varied from 50 to 100. Today (1990) we put the estimate around 80 to 100. Many brief visits have been paid to this island during the last 125 years of the second settlement. Between 1967 and 1989 this author has had the opportunity of several short visits. The Sentinelese do not seem to be too eager to quietly surrender one of the last bastions of the 'primitive man' to the onslaught of 'civilized man'. They have so far succeeded in defending their little island with their bows and arrows and with their refusal to succumb to soft persuasions and blandishments in the form of little gifts of coconuts, bananas, iron pieces and tools, though such things seem to have worked with the Jarawa.

The Sentinelese are well aware of outsiders, and appreciate the dangers that may lie ahead of them. Their reaction to visits has been one of extreme hostility and disapproval. In 1974, they showered dozens of arrows on the boat carrying the visitors, even injuring one member. But they do not take on a party if they find themselves heavily outnumbered or too poorly armed to fight. They seem to have a clear idea of the power of the gun.

In 1967 the author was able to see their entire settlement of 18 huts in the middle of the island, where things were lying around and fires were burning (Pandit 1967). But we were a very large party with weapons, though we did not need to use them. They hid themselves inside the forest and returned to the shore when we were back in our boats. On our 1978 visit only a handful of them were sitting close to the shore and they did not bother to follow our movements. During the 1982 visits they seemed to have mellowed a bit, but in November we found them still suspicious of outsiders and unwilling to have close personal contact. They shot three arrows in the direction of party members who were trying to approach them. But on some earlier occasions, and during the 1984-89 visits they felt free to come fairly close to our boat in their dug-out canoes to pick up the gifts of coconuts which were floating in the sea.

Previous References

Since the Sentinelese have remained very isolated from other populations, both Negrito and others, there are only scanty references to them in the old literature and even those are quite brief and sometimes a bit confusing.

Man (1883:30) uses the term Jarawa to mean all the tribes excluding the Great Andaman tribes. By implication, it would include one 'hostile' tribe within Great Andaman (later exclusively called Jarawa); the inhabitants of Little Andaman (later identified as Onge) and those of North Sentinel Island (later called the Sentinelese). It would also include the aboriginal inhabitants of other smaller or larger islands in and around the South Andaman sea, with whom no proper contact had been established till then i.e. 1883. In the Gazetteer of A & N Islands (1909:2) the North Sentinel Island is mentioned by name but its inhabitants are lumped together with those living in parts of South Andaman and Rutland. Further, the Onge–Jarawa group is distinguished from the Great Andaman group by certain characteristics such as the form of the huts, bows and arrows, and canoes; ornamentation, females, clothing, their dressing, tattooing, utensils, and language with differences of minor detail within each of the two groups (Boden Kloss 1902:190). He again refers to the *Jarawa* as the inhabitants of 'North Sentinel, Rutland Island and South Andaman' who have proved quite irreconcilable, their attitude often explaining the total disappearance that sometimes follows the escape of the convicts. Radcliffe-Brown (1922/1933/1948: 13-17) did his fieldwork in the Andamans from 1906 to 1908. He does make a clear and unambiguous distinction between the Great Andaman Group (including all Great Andaman tribes except Jarawa) and the Little Andaman Group which includes: The Onge of Little Andaman; the Jarawa of South Andaman; and the inhabitants of North Sentinel Island.

For the first time the North Sentinel people are distinguished and separated from the Jarawa. He further describes (ibid: 412-13) a type of communal hut as a 'long shelter', apparently used only on North Sentinel Island. As reported by Rogers in 1903, it was rectangular, 40 ft. long and 12 ft. wide. The roof was supported on three rows of small posts ranging in height from 3 ft. at the back and 6 ft. at the front of the hut. The roof projected about 2 ft. on either side beyond the posts and was about 2 ft. from the ground at the back and 7 ft. above the ground at the front. There were 12 places for fires, six in front and six at the back and near each, on the right hand side, was a platform supported on four sticks, of the usual Andamanese type, to keep food. There were two rows of sleeping places which were separated by small poles, making rectangles on the ground about 5 ft. by 4 ft, each of which was

probably occupied by a man and his wife and small children. A hut of the type described above has been observed on one of our recent visits (March 1989) and photographed; only this one was about 18 ft. long.

A reference has been made by Radcliffe-Brown to the North Sentinelese canoe also.

However, in the ethnographic notes in the 1931 Census (Bonington 1932: 9-11) there are a number of references to the Sentinelese of North Sentinel Island and their material culture. 'Onge–Jarawa group is the only one still intact. These inhabit the whole of South Andaman, Rutland, Little Andaman and North Sentinel'. (Of course the penal settlement areas in South Andaman were implicitly excluded from the description.) He found that the Jarawa and Sentinelese bows have similar patterns marked on them, while the Onge bow has no special markings; a basket found on North Sentinel in 1927 was of very fine workmanship; the Jarawa and Sentinel islanders wear a short tassel and have also been found quite naked; the Sentinelese have a different canoe from the Great Andamanese, turning upwards and cut off short at both ends, which is not a good sea boat and can only be used on the shallow reefs surrounding the island. The Jarawa have no canoe but build rafts for crossing the straits; the Jarawa and Onge construct large communal huts, though differing in shape. The Onge sleep on raised cane platforms in the huts, while the Jarawa and Sentinelese sleep on the ground; the Sentinelese bury their infants in their huts, placing a nautilus shell and other smaller shells over the grave. The same has been recorded of the other groups; the Jarawa of South Andaman and Sentinelese are apparently very closely allied; possibly the latter are Jarawa.

It may be added here that the Census report of 1911 for the first time included the population figures of the Sentinelese as a separate group. It was only an estimated figure of 117. The subsequent Census reports continued this trend. But the 1951 Census gives no notes or figures of their population so the 1931 estimates are just repeated here. The 1961 Census (102-105) repeats the same figures with a short note.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sentinelese : Settlement Pattern and Material Culture

At the third international conference on hunter-gatherers held at Bad-Homburg, West Germany in June 1983, where I represented India, I was informed by my colleagues from all the other continents that the Sentinelese were probably the most isolated and hence the least known and exposed human community in the world. This fact alone makes this one of the most significant human societies in the world.

Though the British administrators tried to survey, explore and administer all the remote areas of the Andaman islands, North Sentinel Island seems to have been left relatively alone, for whatever reasons, despite its geographical proximity to Port Blair, the capital town and administrative headquarters. For one thing, the island is a small one (about 60 sq kms) and the forest or other natural wealth here was not sufficient to call for urgent exploitation. The recorded visits to this island during the British days and for many years later were few and far between. The administrators who visited the area were Homfray (1867) Portman (1886) Rogers (1902) Bonington (1926) etc. (See Cipriani 1966 and Census of India 1931). After the departure of the British in 1947 the approach remained the same for many years. In 1954 Cipriani (1966) paid a visit to the island but made no contact with the Sentinelese. A major breakthrough was made in the course of two official expeditions sent to the island by the Andaman Administration in early 1967: one in January and one in April. I was a member of the official party on the second expedition. This made me the first anthropologist to have ever visited the island.

Settlement Pattern

Below are reproduced excepts from my unpublished report (Pandit: 1967). The unbelievably long spell of unconcern for the islanders was recently broken when a party of Andaman Administrators led by Mahabir Singh, the Chief Commissioner, paid a one-day visit to the island during January 1967. This was followed up by another visit on 26 April, 1967 by a party of officers and men of the Andaman Administration led by M.B. Malhotra, the Deputy Commissioner; and

those of the Indian Naval Establishment at Port Blair led by Commander Ghosh and one anthropologist, myself.

We were transported to the island by the police patrol boat and the naval personnel came on *I.N.S. Akhshay*. We took with us for protection a contingent of armed men of the Andaman Police led by R.K. Ohri, the Superintendent of Police, Port Blair. As our boats approached the shores of the island we could see, through binoculars, clusters of dark-skinned adults on the shore with some children. From the boat one could not made out their facial features but they appeared to be of a fairly good height. As our landing parties approached the beach the Sentinelese disappeared into the forest. We tried to pursue them but failed to make contact with them. A couple of policemen claimed to have seen a few of them, including a woman and a child of about 12 years.

Habitation

About 1 km inside the forest we came upon a settlement consisting of 18 huts. The huts were almost alike and were built very close to each other in small clearings, under the trees. On our approach the Sentinelese had obviously left in a hurry, leaving fires burning in all the huts.

These were rather small in size, apparently meant for a small group to live in. Most probably these were temporary shelters and there might be relatively more permanent structures in the interior.

The huts were simply constructed in the shape of lean-to shelters i.e., a roof resting on four vertical poles of which the two in front are longer and the two at the back shorter (ratio approximately 2:1). To these four poles are lashed, at the top, four other horizontal ones so as to make a rectangle. To this rectangular structure are lashed, slopewise, a series of parallel poles to serve as the base of the roof. The poles are then covered with layers of leaves to make them waterproof. The huts have no walls of any kind, nor anything like a platform, as the Onge have. Obviously the Sentinelese sit and sleep on the ground, where some leaves are spread. It is very interesting to note that each hut had four (sometimes five) fires burning at the corners of the hut and each fire was fenced off from inside by a row of vertical sticks. Besides other uses the fires might have been a protection against snakes and poisonous insects. The inner fencing would be to prevent any accidents during sleep or otherwise. The approximate measurements of the hut are as follows :

Height (front)	2.25 m
Height (back)	1.25 m

Length	2.25 m
Breadth	1.50 m

The belongings of each household were kept inside the hut. These consisted of wooden buckets, bows, arrows and spears and the raw materials for these. In one hut we also saw a plastic glass-like thing—apparently washed up by the sea. It was made use of by the Sentinelese as a container. At one or two places in the middle of the settlement we found shavings of wood, not yet dry: obviously someone had been working at making some bows, weapons and tools.

Like the other Negrito communities of the Andamans, the Sentinelese are hunters and food gatherers. They know the use of metal, though one wonders where the iron comes from. They have a curved long bow in which the cord is looped to the ends of the stave. The arrows we saw had metal heads and had two barbs each at the base. They were lashed firmly to a slender shaft that was about 125 cm (4 ft.) long. Besides the large bows we found some smaller ones too and a bundle of ordinary wooden arrows. There was a fishing spear with a number of pointed wooden prongs. One of the prongs had an iron nail attached to it.

Artefacts

Among the collection of tools we saw an adze, superior in construction to that of the Onge but basically the same. It had an iron blade lashed to the haft. Apparently it was being used at the time for chiselling a block of wood to make a bucket out of it. If they made canoes (as reported by earlier visitors, though we did not see any) it would be used for that. There were baskets of the type used by the Onge. Some of these contained the food materials collected from the forest. We noticed pig skulls around the huts and at some distance from the settlement there was a heap of pig's bones. This shows that they hunt the pigs which must be found wild on the island. Among other food materials we found some wild *cheeku* (a fruit) and also pandanus, a fruit also used by the Onge. In one of the buckets we found some raw honey.

Hostility

Our party did not encounter any resistance from the Sentinelese when we landed. Of course, they kept us under observation and were seen carrying bows and arrows. But when our landing parties approached the beach they simply hid themselves in the forest. Sòme of them reappeared on the shore when the last of us had boarded the boat again.

During the January visit an arrow was thrown at the Chief Commissioner's party which did not hurt anyone as it only hit the

ground.

If the Sentinelese are really as hostile as they are generally believed to be, the only reason for their not attacking us could be that we were a large party and they dared not attempt it. One wonders what their reaction would be if only a few people were to land. Another theory can be that they are not as bad as the Jarawa, but fight shy of strangers and might attack only if they feel it necessary and convenient.

Material Culture

During our expedition we were able to collect a few artefacts from the Sentinelese settlement in exchange for gifts placed in their huts. A description of the specimens is given below:

Bow: Two specimens were found. One was plain and the other had small, straight lines etched vertically and horizontally to make pretty but simple geometrical designs. The bigger bow is 1400 mm long and 500 mm in width and has a thickness of 160 mm in the middle. The stave is strong but wildly flexible, and plano-convex in cross section. The bowstring of twisted bark fibres is fixed to the two tapered ends of the stave, which are notched to receive it. When not in use, the string is left loose at one end.

The bow is used for hunting wild pig, fishing and also as a weapon of offence and defence against outside humans if perceived as hostile. I have seen two Sentinelese warriors go up a tree and take better aim at our boat anchored at a long distance (60-70 m) from shore (Pandit 1974).

I have observed the Sentinelese using their bows and arrows as weapons of attack against our parties when they felt provoked, offended or threatened.

I have also observed them using the long arrow to spear a trussed pig left by us as a gift on the beach (1974).

Multi-pronged wooden harpoon spear: This has a single flexible shaft 1860 mm long (similar to that of the arrow) with four very hard and pointed areca wood harpoon heads of slightly varying lengths, (around 440 mm). This could be used for harpooning larger fish. According to the late Loka, an Andamanese leader, the harpoon can also be used with the help of a large bow, but I have not observed this anywhere.

I have also seen a Sentinelese harpoon head tipped with sharp bone points but the specimen is not traceable at present.

Grinding and hammer stones: Two stones (somewhat rounded heavy pebbles) were found. One had markings as a result of iron blades

being sharpened on it. The other was more rounded, with a kind of grip: this could be a hammer stone used for hammering iron pieces into shape to make arrow and spear heads.

Plucking stiçk: This is a straight cane shaft (2200 mm long) with a small stick (260 mm long) firmly tied to one end. It could be used to bend branches of trees to pluck fruits, leaves, flowers etc.

Arrow-cum-spear: The Sentinelese arrow is the longest I have seen among the four Negrito tribes. It has a long (15320 mm) wooden flexible cane shaft which has smoky rings around it, caused by putting it in a slow fire for strength. It has a diameter of 480 mm at the top end, 430 mm in the middle and 330 mm at the bottom end. At the butt end it has a U-shaped notch to receive the bowstring, and is wrapped around with fibre strings for strength.

The arrow/spear head is made of iron with rough workmanship. It is flattish and lancet shaped with two outward projecting barbs at the lower end.

The hose at the lower end is for tying it firmly to the shaft. It is 1520 mm long and 480 mm wide in the middle; and somewhat converse in cross section.

It is similar to that of the Onge pig-arrow. It is used for hunting pig, both as an arrow and a spear and for catching larger fish.

Bamboo pot: It is 100 mm high and 1260 mm in diameter and is used to store the clay used for painting bodies. The internode serves as the bottom and there is no workmanship of any kind.

Nautilus shell: This is a whole shell, used as a pot for drinking water and for bailing out water from the dug-out canoe.

Fishing net: This is knitted from bark fibre thread and is supported by a cane rim and handle (which is missing, since this specimen is damaged) at the top. One such net is held in either hand, immersed in the water and brought together rim to rim to trap small fish around the coast.

The Jarawa and the Onge have very similar hand fishing nets.

Cane basket: This finely woven basket, somewhat damaged, is cone shaped, with a diameter of 12400 mm. and a height of 5400 mm. It is woven around 17 vertical sticks held together at the base, and rounded off at the top to form a thick rim.

It is a carrying basket for collecting, carrying and storing fruits and tubers from the forest, mostly used by women.

Waist band: This is 6900 mm. long and 900 mm. wide, and consists of two bark sheets sewn together to serve as a waist band or

belt. It is used by the men to keep arrows during hunting.

The Jarawa use a much wider bark sheath for a similar purpose and to protect the abdomen, but the Onge do not use anything of this kind.

Bark Fibre: Long strips of bark fibre are kept ready for making bowstrings, or to use as rope, thongs, etc.

Resin: This is a plant product, black in colour and hard and dry in texture, and is collected from the forest. It is highly combustible and gives off a fragrance when burned.

The Onge and the Jarawa use it for making torches. The resin, mixed with pieces of clay, is wrapped in leaves into a cone-shaped torch. It is lit from the broad end to preserve the fire and used for lighting purposes.

None of the Negrito tribes has any artificial means of making fire. They keep it alive all the time. The Sentinelese must be using the resin for similar purposes.

Pig skull: This is a whole pig skull painted over with red ochre and tied up with cane strips. It is kept hanging in the hut. It is a hunter's trophy. Among the Onge, after every hunt the skull is cleaned and lovingly painted by the women and kept in the hut (Cipriani 1966: 138–139).

Sometimes pig skulls or turtle shells may be kept in a heap near the settlement (Pandit : 1967) as among the Sentinelese. The full significance of this and other related practices is not yet understood.

'Chess' board: This is a wooden board, 5200 mm long, 3700 mm wide and 23 mm thick, made of soft porous wood. The top surface is engraved with 64 squares. Alternate squares are studded with pieces of shell and stone.

Thus it is very much like a chess board. But it is not clear if the Sentinelese have made it, or if it has been washed up by the sea.

The other Andaman tribes do not have any such games or amusements.

Dug-out canoe: Like the Onge and the original Great Andamanese tribes, the Sentinelese do use a dug-out canoe. The Jarawa have only rafts for crossing creeks etc. However, the Sentinelese canoe is smaller in size than that of the Onge. The Onge canoe is much sturdier and can carry more people. The Sentinelese canoe was seen carrying only one or two people. It is, like the Onge canoe, a single outrigger dug-out canoe. It is used for transportation, fishing and turtle hunting in the coastal waters around the island. A nautilus shell is used to bail out water from the canoe.

I have observed many specimens of canoes on my visits to North Sentinel Island in the 1980s.

CHAPTER THREE

Social Identity, Population, Language and Social Organization

The Sentinelese is a name derived from the name of the island. We do not know the name by which North Sentinel islanders call themselves. I have heard the Onge referring to them and their island as 'Chankvitay'. Even the 'Jarawa' is a term used by the Great Andamanese to refer to them. It means 'the other people'. 'Onge' is a genuine Onge term which means human beings. The Great Andamanese, obviously, is also a derivative name used by us as a collective term for the small group of 28 survivors of the ten original tribes apart from the Jarawa and the Sentinelese who occupied Great Andaman islands.

In old literature, Jarawa has been used rather loosely to cover the Onge, the Sentinelese and the Jarawa themselves. At some stage, the Onge came to be identified separately but the Sentinelese continued to be identified as a Jarawa sub-group. It was only in the 1931 Census that they were officially accorded a separate and independent identity as a distinct tribal community, though together with the Jarawa they were labelled as hostile.

However, in all old and new references (Man: 1883; Radcliffe-Brown: 1924; Census 1931, 1951, 1961 etc) the Andaman Negritos have been broadly classified into two categories: The Great Andamanese group; and the Onge–Jarawa–Sentinelese group.

Each group had greater similarity in terms of culture, language and technology within itself than with the other group. This position seems to be broadly correct. Though the differences in customs, material culture and language are not very sharp, they are there.

I have observed that the Great Andamanese leader Loka (Aka-jeru tribe) did not understand a single Jarawa word nor could he make the three captured Jarawa boys (June-July, 1968) understand a word of his own language.

On the contrary, we have observed that some Onge words are somewhat similar to those of the Jarawa and Sentinelese. In 1974 when some Onge accompanied our party on a 3-day visit to North Sentinel Island the Onge reacted perceptibly to every hostile gesture and speech of the Sentinelese warriors. Not only that, at one stage the Onge tried to hide themselves from view inside the motor-boat on hearing the angry

outburst of the Sentinelese; and kept shivering and cowering there, visibly shaken with fear. Probably they had understood or at least sensed the dire verbal warnings of the Sentinelese which made little sense to us. This, in spite of the fact that our boat was a good 60-80 m from the beach where the Sentinelese were standing. However, we were quite often within arrow range and one of us was hit by a long shafted arrow (with a short nail-like arrow head).

In any case, whatever the similarities, long isolation on different islands must have led to the development of noticeable linguistic variations of a kind that would qualify each group to claim a separate language for itself. Of course, the origins must be the same. The four Negrito languages in the Andamans would thus constitute a distinct linguistic family whose links with any other language group in the world, if any, are yet to be traced.

Population

The present estimates of their population are within the range of 80–100. These are partly based on actual observation (using eye observation and binoculars) of the groups that have been encountered from 1967 to 1987. Besides, the area of the island is about 60 sq km which would normally support a population of only about 40 (in terms of hunting–gathering economy standards whereby 1 man roughly needs about 1.5 sq km of forest land to survive). But that does not take into account the rich sea resources available to them all around the island, which are plentiful even if marginally exploited in view of their simple technology. A single sea turtle weighing 15 to 50 kg could support a whole band of 20–30 people for a couple of days. In any case, groups of upto 30–60 people have been actually observed on the beach in single encounters.

It is our experience that whenever we go to visit the Sentinelese a whole lot of them will come out onto the beach or stand around close to the edge of the forest to keep a watch over us, both out of curiosity and anxiety about our possible motives. If we were to arrange for 3 or 4 motor boats and equip ourselves with suitable cameras, and binoculars, we could obtain a more accurate estimate of their population and make some more useful observations. Even helicopters could be used for surveying the camps as a simultaneous operation.

Social Organization

That the Sentinelese are a hunting–gathering community is beyond doubt. Moreover, their material culture and technology leave not an iota of doubt about their close cultural identity (apart from the obvious physical one) with the Onge, Jarawa and the original Great Andamanese

tribes. However, at this stage we cannot say for certain what kind of or how many territorial divisions there exist among them. Any understanding of their family, marriage and kinship system or leadership pattern will have to wait for a closer and more intimate contact with them. The only significant observations of any kind were made by me two decades back (Pandit:1967) regarding their settlement pattern. Those observations throw some light on their social organization especially when the inferences are drawn after taking into account the lifestyle of the Onge and the Jarawa.

In 1967, at least 18 lean-to type huts, all actually in use on that day—as fires were lighted in all of them—indicated the presence of a band/local group of that size. If the average membership of each hut the size of a nuclear family was 3 or 4, the population of the camp could safely be estimated as 50 to 70. It could be that some members of other bands were present as guests on that occasion. But the cleared space was quite spacious, and had a much-used look. However, no permanent communal type of hut like that of the Onge or Jarawa has been observed so far among the Sentinelese.

That we do not see or encounter the Sentinelese every time we visit the island (or see only a few of them, 2 to 12) would seem to indicate that they keep moving around in search of food and lead a semi-nomadic existence. Besides, their material culture and technology is concrete evidence of their lifestyle.

Among the Onge, each small lean-to type hut is inhabited by a nuclear family only. There is no reason to suspect otherwise with the Sentinelese. But a series of such family groups would constitute the band/local group which would be the basic economic unit for food collection and meeting other material and social-cultural needs. It may be added here that the Sentinelese are apparently much more dependent on sea-food resources than the Jarawa. They eat more varieties of molluscan life such as king shell, turbo shells etc. It may also be noted that the Jarawa do not have a dug-out canoe to better exploit the sea resources, and for them the king and turbo shells are ornamental shells and are of commercial value. But around North Sentinel Island they are not collected by the non-tribal people, this being a protected tribal reserve area under Andaman and Nicobar, Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Act 1956.

Observations of Interactional Behaviour

Under this heading one would normally have primarily described the social behavioural norms of the Sentinelese among themselves. However, we know too little about their social-cultural institutions to make any statements about that. But it is possible to draw some indirect

and marginal inferences about this aspect while we take note of their general behaviour towards us: the outsiders, the members of the official parties that have been visiting them since 1967, and more frequently since 1976. I have been associated with many of these visits and the following description is based almost entirely on my own observations.

My first visit to North Sentinel Island was on 26 April, 1967 with an official party led by the Deputy Commissioner, Andaman islands. We were a large party that included some senior administrative, police and naval officers. I was the only anthropologist. We travelled by ship, but for our landings we used rubber dinghies. As our boats appeared on the horizon we noticed several dark figures on the beach. They were too far for us to observe their facial expressions; but they did not show any obvious reaction in terms of body or limb movements to indicate any response to our presence. On our reaching close to the shore, all these people went into the forest, from where they kept a watch over us. The armed police personnel landed first, with us following. About a km. inside we found a clearing with a settlement of 18 huts. There was every sign of the settlement having been just abandoned, temporarily of course, perhaps out of fear. They did not resist our entry, nor did they show any sign of friendliness. Some policemen claimed that they had seen a few of them lurking behind trees. Some of the men picked up a few of their bows, arrows and other artefacts as mementoes, in exchange for gifts of plastic buckets, cloth, sweets, and utensils, unsolicited, of course. I objected to this but was overruled by the police officials. Later, some of these items were secured for our anthropology museum and are still there. The whole atmosphere was that of conquering hordes over-running conquered territory. It was not to my taste at all. It hurt my sensibilities as an anthropologist.

When we returned to our boats (I was the last one to come away) the Sentinelese reappeared on the shore. During the January 1967 visit one arrow had been shot by the Sentinelese towards the contact party, but no one was hit. This time, not even a token resistance was shown. They were obviously overawed by our large numbers.

My next encounter was in 1974 (7 years later). This time the approach and the strategy were quite different. A large boat *MV Tarmugli* was requisitioned and we stayed in the area for 3 days and nights. The idea was to persist with the operation of befriending the Sentinelese over a longer period, and to watch and observe their reactions with patience. This time there was no plan to land large numbers of armed personnel on shore and to overwhelm them. Instead, we wanted to try to win their friendship by friendly gestures and plenty of gifts of pots and pans, red cloth, a live pig, coconuts, iron tools etc. The offering of gifts was to be spread out over three days of both morning and afternoon operations.

When our small ship anchored at a safe distance, the Sentinelese came out to observe things. As our motor boat approached the shore the armed Sentinelese warriors stood there with grim faces and their bows and arrows ready for action. (The Sentinelese were photographed for the first time on this operation.) As our boat approached closer, arrows flew around us as warning shots. Later they hit our boat repeatedly and one man was hurt in the thigh. As the doctor attended to him there was a commotion in the boat. The Sentinelese, noticing all this, expressed their joy and satisfaction through various gestures. They laughed and jumped and talked excitedly and with exhilaration.

They showed no interest in the red cloth left ashore as a gift. The aluminium pots and pans were picked up and examined with curiosity. Red plastic buckets were liked by them though the green ones were not. The live white pig dropped ashore as a gift, all trussed up, was instantly speared by one Sentinelese male and allowed to bleed to death. In the afternoon of that day we found that they had buried the pig in the sand at the beach itself, without eating any part of it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

It is fashionable to categorize the nation-states into the first (Western block) second (Soviet block) and third world (most Asian, African and Latin American countries) in terms of industrial, military, economic and political power. It has been suggested by some people that the marginal societies living at the fringes of the dominant populations in these countries actually constitute a fourth world cutting across political and geographical barriers as they face similar problems. But hunting–gathering communities like those in the Andamans could by this logic constitute a kind of fifth world. They are truly marginal societies, as they exist on the extreme fringes of socially, politically, economically and demographically dominant societies. In India, in the terminology of the Planning Commission, they have sometimes been referred to the weakest of the weak communities. On this premise special plans for their 'development' and 'upliftment' have been drawn up with a view to bringing them on par with the rest of the population.

In the Andamans the problems of the four small hunting-gathering societies were further compounded by the very unique historical and ecological factors described above. Hence the approach was to draw up separate plans for each of the extremely small Negrito tribes (population ranging from 28 to 200 today). Sometimes planning has been done taking even individual members into consideration. In fact, the kind of planning and thinking that went into this matter was truly unique. The Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Planning Commission jointly with the Andaman Administration, have from time to time appointed special expert advisory committees to assist and advise the government. The latest such committee, constituted in 1986 under the Island Development Authority, is headed by Dr S. C. Sinha. The committee has submitted its recommendations to the Government of India and the A & N Administration.

The author is at present a member of this advisory committee and has had the opportunity to be associated with various other such committees since 1969. The late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi always took a special interest in and showed deep concern for the welfare of the Andaman tribes. The author has personal knowledge of this through his two brief meetings with her in March 1981 and February 1984. In

keeping with the policy of the Central Government, the officers of the Andaman Administration have also been taking a keen interest in this matter over the last two decades. And some good results have been achieved. However, basic trends such as the population decline and social-cultural trauma have not been arrested. So the problem remains very much alive, with all its dangerous potentialities. Let us try to analyze the complexities of the situation a little further.

The Great Andamanese, after the settlement of its surviving members on Strait Island, is a community born anew and comprised of survivors of the original tribes. It was hoped that a deeper sense of solidarity and social interaction would grow among them in time; but although there has been some improvement the community remains disorganized and lacking in any social goals and direction. But the situation could have been far worse without official intervention. There are plenty of people who wish to exploit their women, use their youth for their own purposes, sell them opium illegally etc. The great effort made by the Andaman Administration to check these things has not fully succeeded.

The Onge are still a viable community, but their increasing dependence on outside help, their need for new consumer goods and a more intimate involvement with outside people are factors that will cause problems. Their women are still safe from exploitation by outsiders, but the time may come when they reach the status of the Great Andamanese.

The Jarawa of Middle Andaman are today approximately at the level of contact that we had with the Onge around the mid-twentieth century. They may in due course pass through the stages which the Onge and the Great Andamanese are passing through. The Sentinelese are now on the brink of making friendly contact and there is no reason to think that they will not repeat every phase of the cycle.

It is argued that the 'primitive tribes' should not be denied the benefits of civilization. The anthropologists—it is alleged—with their romantic conceptions and their love for exotic human societies advocate the preservation of 'human zoos'. Yet another argument is that isolation and protection are concepts that prevent these people from joining the 'national mainstream'. Also the 'survival of the fittest', they say, is an accepted fact in the doctrine of organic evolution.

A little analysis will show the fallacy and the speciousness of these apparently valid arguments. Firstly, the benefits of civilization should mean qualitative and wholesome improvement in their lifestyle. But if the process leads to disruption—both physical and cultural—and the opening up to outsiders of exploitative avenues, the basic purpose is defeated. Hence there is need for extreme caution and preventive measures. These are extremely small populations without any potential

for harming the national fabric of a great nation-state. They have little voice and neither the proper awareness nor an understanding of their position as citizens of a large country. Their continued survival as small minorities is very much the responsibility and duty of the dominant community. If such protection is available to plants and animals why not to human beings? If fact, the happy survival of such human groups should be the test of a truly civilized society. But, alas, all over the world it has been observed that their vulnerability and weakness have only invited trouble. They have been pushed and prodded, exploited and ridiculed, causing them psychological trauma and social pain as a result of the extreme greed and acutely chauvinistic ethnocentric attitudes of dominant groups towards weaker groups and communities which are regarded as inferior and different. The latter approach also justifies and rationalizes their exploitative propensities towards such groups.

The time has come to take a well-thought-out and conscious decision to reverse this trend. To start with, there is a great need for public and mass education leading to the acceptance of such groups, with their different looks and lifestyles, as equals. This basic lesson of anthropology, the human science, must be put across effectively. Moreover, planning should be of the highest quality and the execution of plans very sensitively handled. Only well-trained, hand-picked workers in minimum numbers should be allowed entry into these areas.

Anthropologists and enlightened administrators and politicians, as the moulders of public opinion and wielders of political power must all co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts in this common endeavour of great human value. If this happens, the achievement of our objectives need not be as elusive as it seems.

The minorities and the weak have a right to live according to their genius and to change as and when they choose to, according to their needs and in the direction they find useful within the general framework of the national constitutional and legal objectives. The dominant majority has to make it possible for them to do so. The logic of the situation demands it and this is the only 'mantra' to ensure peace and prosperity in a multi-ethnic nation-state like India.

APPENDIX

Reports and Notes on Visits to the Sentinelese, 1970-1989

28 March 1970

The Survey of India programme to survey North Sentinel Island had for long been deferred owing to the non-availability of a boat. At last it did materialize and I accompanied the survey party headed by Captain Sinha to North Sentinel Island on 28 March aboard *MV Tarmugli*.

As the vessel approached the island, a wreck was sighted on the south-east corner of the shore. The vessel was anchored a mile south-west of Constance Island. Sentinel Island is fringed by a barrier reef which affords natural fortification. There are openings in three places which offer an entrance to the landing places. At about 0930 hours a life boat was lowered and in the company of Captain Sinha, two of his technicians and five CRP men, we approached the island to select a suitable place to establish observation posts. Having selected one spot, we approached the main island to carry out further survey verifications. The party landed on the southern shore and with utmost caution approached an opening in the jungle where there appeared to be something like a hut. There was no sign of life. There were two huts, rather crude constructions. There was a heap of hogs' skulls near the hut and although there was ash, it did not appear to be of recent origin. From the huts a winding footpath led into the jungle. We followed the path into the jungle for a good distance. Although there was no sign of anyone in the vicinity, a crude basket with fresh leaves was evidence of someone having been there recently. It was decided that it would be rather risky to penetrate further into the unknown jungle, and in the event of an ambush there might be unnecessary casualties. Hence we retraced our steps and returned to the ship at about 1300 hours after despatching the observation party to the selected site. We proceeded to land and do coastal verification and examine the wreck seen earlier. As we rounded the south-east corner, we saw fresh footprints leading into the jungle from the water's edge. The trail led to a small clearing and a group of huts. The huts were approached with the usual caution. Although the huts were of different sizes the method of construction was very similar to the one seen earlier. In two of the huts there were gratings of 18"x18"x18" made over extinct fires, which appeared to be a sort of oven for cooking food. There was one thing common to all these huts. A stick with five twigs protruding like the five fingers of a hand was planted next to the fire. This, perhaps, is a kind of totem worship. We examined the surroundings and as we withdrew to the beach to proceed to the wreck, a cluster of fresh footprints, large and small, were seen at the edge of the jungle, indicating that we were being watched.

After taking stock of the surroundings, we approached the wreck, which was close by. Inspection of the wreck revealed that it had been lying there for about 7 to 8 months. The broken forward half of the craft was found buried in the sand. Its engine, of the Bolender type, was lying in the water. There was nothing else in the craft. The craft's registered number was marked: SMF 532. After taking a photograph of the craft we proceeded along the coast to a point where a dangerous coral reef about 15 ft high was projecting from the jungle to the water's edge. The party climbed on top of this reef and was studying the coast when a group of tribesmen came out of cover onto the beach about half a mile from us. They were advancing fast and menacingly, and they appeared to be armed with bows and arrows. We retreated fast and were nearing the boat when the crew warned us about another group of tribesmen advancing from the opposite direction. Fearing encirclement we jumped on the boat and withdrew to a safe distance. Meanwhile, as we anticipated, men armed with bows and arrows were advancing from both directions. Women and children also came out of cover. The men advanced to the shore, threatening to shoot the arrows. A few were shot, but had no lethal points. The number of men kept swelling. It was observed that a few of the women were trying to prevent their men from attacking us. Both men and women were completely nude, but for a girdle around their waist, the women wearing a kind of belt. They were well built, lithe and tall. Their exhuberance indicated an abundance of health. It was towards evening when we returned to the ship.

The following morning on 29 March, at about 0830 we approached shore to explore avenues to land an observation party on Constance Island. Coral reefs in various stages of formation were noticed everywhere, and there appeared to be no approach to the island. Besides, the Sentinelese could easily cross over during low tide. It did not appear to be a safe place at night. Hence we abandoned the idea and were about to return when a couple of natives were seen on the land, apparently keeping a vigil. We approached closer, keeping a safe distance from the shore, when more men came out of cover armed with their usual weapons, threatening to shoot at us. We had taken a few large fish caught during the previous night to offer as an appeasement gift to these people. We exhibited these, with gestures of offering. Meanwhile, men were converging on the spot from all directions. Some were waist deep in water and threatening to shoot. However, we approached closer and threw a couple of the fish towards them. They fell short of them and were being carried away by the water. This gesture had a mellowing effect on their belligerent mood. Quite a few discarded their weapons and gestured to us to throw the fish. The women came out of the shade to watch our antics. In their height and stature they were equal to the men except that the lines were softer and they carried no arms. In complexion

and negroid features they were akin to the African Zulus, with a height of about 6 ft. There were 20 children.

We approached the coast a little further from them and managed to land a couple of fish on shore. A few men came and picked up the fish. They appeared to be gratified, but there did not seem to be much softening of their hostile attitude. Again we approached the group. They all began shouting some incomprehensible words. We shouted back and gestured to indicate that we wanted to be friends. The tension did not ease. At this moment a strange thing happened—a woman paired off with a warrior and sat on the sand in a passionate embrace. This act was being repeated by other women, each claiming a warrior for herself, a sort of a community mating, as it were. Thus did the militant group diminish. This continued for quite some time and when the tempo of this frenzied dance of desire abated, the couples retired into the shade of the jungle. However, some of the warriors were still on guard. We got close to the shore and threw some more fish which were immediately retrieved by a few youngsters. It was well past noon and we headed back to the ship. After lunch we went along the western coast to select a spot for observation and the laying of the territorial slab. In the north-west corner of the island we located an isolated patch with a clump of trees, and a safe landing place. There were some footprints and where these disappeared into the jungle a few remains of what appeared to be a canoe and a length of nylon rope. We reconnoitred the area. And on the spot where the present territorial slab stands was a sort of a crude lime kiln. We found a few burnt shells. By then it was near sunset and we headed back to the ship. On the morning of 30 March 1970 *Tarmugli* shifted her anchorage to the north-west corner of Sentinel Island. A party consisting of Captain Sinha, five CRP personnel, PWD men and myself proceeded by boat to land on the north-west corner of the island to fix the territorial slab. We reconnoitred the area for any signs of hostility or surprise attack, and gave protection to the PWD men as they put up the territorial slab. Work was completed in an hour's time. Meanwhile *Tarmugli* had arrived and anchored off the reefs. We reached the ship and despatched the observation party. Fortunately, the sky was clear that night and successful observations were completed. The party returned to the ship by about 0700 hours on the morning of 31 March 1970. *Tarmugli* weighed anchor and sailed. We arrived in Port Blair just a little after noon.

From a study of the attitudes and behaviour of the Sentinelese I am of the opinion, that although the natives are hostile at the first encounter, with the right approach they may be amenable to friendship in a short while.

Report on an encounter with the Sentinelese on North Sentinel Island by a team of the Survey of India.

March 1974

Our party included the Deputy Commissioner, Ramesh Chandra; Raghubir Singh, photographer; the Superintendent of Police, T. R. Kakkar; a Government film director and crew; a doctor; Vasant Chowdhury the social worker; three Onge, Napi Kotai, Kanjo and Tambolay; and a police escort including a wireless operator. We sailed from Port Blair after midnight on 28 March in the touring ship *Tarmugli*. I was on the deck before dawn, as North Sentinel became visible at first light. The three Onge were already there and as we came near the island, everyone was peering intently at the long strip of dense forest with a thin belt of sand skirting it. We were less than a mile away when the captain began tooting the horn and dropped anchor. The Onge pointed at the eastern end of the island but we could not see any signs of life even through binoculars. Their sight is far superior to ours. We sipped tea as the ship's lifeboat was lowered and the morning sun rose. Crowding into the boat we headed towards where the Onge had pointed. My expectations of seeing the Sentinelese were high. Suddenly, when we were one hundred and fifty yards from the shore, one Negrito emerged from the forest, a dark, well-built man pointing a drawn bow and arrow at us, with two arrows tucked into a belt of bark, his only clothing besides bark strips around each bicep. There was excitement on the boat. The Onge were given the mouthpiece of the loudspeaker which Chowdhury held pointed towards the Sentinelese. Nine others crept out of the jungle with drawn bows. The Onge shouted,'We are friends, come close, we mean no harm, we come in peace'. We were about eighty yards from them. One Sentinelese took a few steps forward, bent his body back and, aiming towards the sky for a high trajectory, shot an arrow which hit the metal sides of our boat with a loud clang. We were taken aback. The Deputy Commissioner shouted for the boat to be moved back. From a distance of a hundred yards, which we considered safe, the Onge sang 'We come from a distance to befriend you'. The singing brought a response from one Sentinelese who moved his hips and his feet in tune to the boat. The Sentinelese shouted back something which the Onge seemed not to understand. Kanjo quite clearly said in Hindi,'I do not understand what they say'.

It was decided to drop gifts. We moved up the shore away from the Sentinelese. But as soon as they saw we were going to land they rushed towards us. We had to abandon the attempt and instead tossed into the water, near the shore, some plastic buckets, one toy plastic automobile, and a bunch of bananas, before quickly moving away. The Sentinelese ignored the gifts and continued to threaten us. Ramesh Chandra suggested that we go about five hundred yards up the coast. The police, wearing pads around their bodies and hiding behind shields, jumped into

a dinghy which was attached to our boat and quickly left one Yorkshire pig, some red cloth, coconuts, bananas, and green and red buckets. This time some Sentinelese did start running but not as fast, and we were out of range before they reached the gifts. One woman, who emerged from the bushes with a cane basket on her back, picked up everything except the red cloth. As the Yorkshire pig, tethered to a bush, was hidden, we were not sure whether it had been taken. She lifted some coconuts, smiled and waved them towards us. Since they had accepted the gifts it was decided to go nearer. The consensus even among the Onge was that they wanted more coconuts. But then an arrow hit the film director and lodged an inch deep in the flesh of his left thigh. The doctor quickly examined and dressed the wound, saying it was not serious. The Negrito who had shot the arrow, seeing it had reached its mark, laughed happily and proudly walked towards the shade of a tree, where he sat down. Earlier, stones and a piece of driftwood were thrown at us. We returned to the ship, where I examined the arrow. It was a piece of iron fashioned into a nail, tied with bark to the end of a bamboo about eight feet long.

In the afternoon we returned to the island. We were about a hundred yards away when ten Sentinelese appeared from the bushes. Some wore yellowish headbands, armlets and waist-bands, unlike those in the morning. Was it the same group in new attire, or a new one? One woman—or was it a man—had some leaves tucked into her belt at the back, like a Jarawa boy at Chotalingbang. As we went closer they became agitated. An arrow passed over the centre of the boat on level with our heads. We ducked and it splashed into the water behind us. Suddenly, two Sentinelese ran and climbed a tree, appearing on a limb fifteen feet above the ground, which provided them with a better trajectory. But they did not shoot, as we were too far away. We moved away and left gifts at the same spot as in the morning. They watched us, but not until we had gone several hundred yards did they pick them up. Then, out of the forest, a whole line of about twenty women carrying empty baskets on their backs trooped out and walked down the beach with a single armed man keeping guard, and disappeared into the forest where a few temporary lean-tos stood in a clearing. These shelters were cruder than those of the Onge and from a distance resembled the Jarawa structures. We went up the length of the island but did not see any more Negritos.

Next morning, turtle tracks leading from the foliage to the sea looked for a moment like the drag marks of a dug-out. Dug-outs had been seen on previous trips. Fresh footprints were visible, the only signs of human beings. On the western end, about six hundred yards away, three figures appeared on the sand and ran into the forest. We went near them and left gifts on the shore. As we withdrew they crept forward and watched us from behind the cover of bushes. They were

armed but did not threaten us. Suddenly, the wireless operator who was talking to the ship said that the captain, through his field glasses, had sighted about twenty well-armed Sentinelese moving towards us. There was a curve in the coastline and soon they appeared silhouetted against the sky. We tried to find another spot for gifts, moved further east and saw still another group appearing and joining the others. Through my lens I noticed several of them hugging, while one sat on the other's lap. The embrace continued for minutes. This was the same form of greeting used by the other Negritos when different bands or persons met after a long separation, the period of the embrace being in proportion to the length of the separation. Obviously the forty-five men before us comprised two or more bands. Perhaps all the males except the aged and the babies of the estimated total population of one hundred and fifty persons were before us. The word had probably gone round and they had collected to meet the "threat" to their territory. There were some boys among them and one woman was breast feeding a baby she carried in her arms. We went up the coast and tried to land but some of them ran towards us so we threw coconuts and a bucket on the shore. The man who picked up the bucket was delighted, he filled it and then emptied it and proudly walked away with it. Another man was busy ripping a coconut with his teeth and soon happily eating it. Again we tried to land. This time they simply watched us leave one doll, an axe, one pink pan, a saw, one Yorkshire pig, aluminium dishes, and coconuts. Then several of them broke into a sprint. The first one to reach speared the pig with two quick thrusts and piled sand over it. Now we knew what had happened to the last pig. One Negrito speared the doll. A boy picked up the aluminium dishes and waved them at us. More arrived and a man walked away with the pink plastic pan on his head, his jaunty gait revealing his delight. One Sentinelese took the saw with a smile. A boy took the axe, walked towards the trees and stood in the shade watching us with his leg around the handle and left hand resting on the inverted blade. But then, in spite of the gifts, an arrow was shot at us. It fell far short of the mark, but one nervous member of our party flipped backwards into the water and was pulled up stuttering and dripping wet. This arrow was three-pronged with bone-tips at the points. As we were returning to the ship the wireless operator announced that the Pay Commission had given the Superintendent of Police an increase in his salary. We were back in the twentieth century.

T. N. Pandit
Superintending Anthropologist.

24 October 1981

On this occasion, the goodwill mission was led by the Chief Secretary, Andaman and Nicobar Administration. When the party reached near Sentinel Island, two Sentinelese were seen on the shore. Immediately, a party consisting of Bhaktawar Singh, Executive Secretary, AAJVS; the Deputy Superintendent of Police; and other policemen left by outboat towards the direction of the Sentinelese. In the mean time, four more Sentinelese had appeared on the shore. The party landed ashore about a furlong away from the place where the Sentinelese were standing, dropped the gifts and proceeded back to the police boat. Soon after the departure of the party, the Sentinelese started picking up the gifts. In all, twelve Sentinelese were seen. They did not show any gesture of hostility, unlike on previous occasions. The second trip to drop gifts by outboat was also launched by the party consisting of Bhaktawar Singh, Janardhana Shukla and a few policemen. The party reached the shore and started dropping gifts. No sooner had the last package of the gifts been dropped than two Sentinelese armed with bows and arrows were seen coming towards them. On the way back to the police boat in anchorage, the outboat capsized in the rough sea and the members of the party had to swim. Ultimately, all the members of the party were rescued. It was observed that the Sentinelese were found watching the members of the party struggling in the water within shooting range, but they did not shoot.

T. N. Pandit

3 January 1982

The goodwill mission was led by the Superintendent of Police, Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A party headed by the Superintendent of Police dropped the gifts, making three trips by outboat to the shore of Sentinel Island. On every trip the party landed and dropped gifts in the presence of the Sentinelese who were standing at a distance of about 200 yards. The Sentinelese picked up the gifts and did not show any sign of hostility.

T. N. Pandit

21 February 1982

The goodwill mission was led by the Deputy Commissioner, Andaman District. Immediately on reaching Sentinel Island, the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police and Executive Secretary, AAJVS went near the beach by outboat. While moving from east to west, they could see two Sentinelese canoes which were of the same

pattern as the canoes used by the Onges. Near these canoes, one Sentinelese was found sitting in the bush and when the party waved to draw his attention, twenty Sentinelese including five children, came running out to the beach with bows, arrows and spears. On previous occasions the gifts had been left on the beach to be picked up later by the Sentinelese. But this time, the party thought it wise to throw a few coconuts into the sea in front of the Sentinelese, keeping the party itself at a safe distance. This idea was immediately acted upon. It attracted the attention of the Sentinelese. For the first time the Sentinelese placed their canoe in the water and started collecting coconuts floating on the sea. When the party tried to go near them, one of the Sentinelese raised his bow and arrow and threatened them, whereupon the party started throwing more coconuts and the Sentinelese, including the provoked one, started collecting the coconuts. This practice of throwing coconuts was resorted to for the second and third time and the Sentinelese went on collecting. From their gestures it appeared that they also wanted iron implements, but the party had not taken any with them on this occasion.

T. N. Pandit

28 February 1982

The goodwill mission was led by the Deputy Commissioner, Andaman District. On this occasion the party did not see any Sentinelese. However, the party landed ashore and dropped gifts to be picked up later by the Sentinelese.

T. N. Pandit

15 March 1982

The party consisting of the Deputy Commissioner; Superintendent of Police; Additional District Magistrate; Deputy Director, Anthropological Survey of India, Port Blair; and the Executive Secretary, AAJVS visited Sentinel Island to make contact with the Sentinelese and drop off gift articles. The gifts were dropped ashore on 15 and 16 March. The party also went around Sentinel Island by police boat, but no Sentinelese could be seen. The party noticed that the gifts dropped on 28 February seemed to have been picked up by the Sentinelese, as they were not lying where they had been dropped. Leftovers of food were also noticed. However, the party landed on the island and made itself familiar with the surroundings.

T. N. Pandit

19 November 1982

A team of officers consisting of Jagdish Sagar, V.V.Bhat, P.V.Sinari, T.N.Pandit, S.A.Awardai, Mewa Lall and Bhaktawar Singh visited the south-eastern side of North Sentinel Island on 19 November, on a gift giving mission. The team left Wandoor by *M V Milale* at 0600 and reached at 0945 hours. At the time of anchoring, two persons were seen on the beach. At 0945 Sinari reported on the walkie-talkie that four persons were seen on the beach and they looked very suspicious in their movements. He alighted on the beach and gifts were placed. The Sentinelese came forward and picked up the gifts, then suddenly started shooting arrows. Sinari swam across to the dinghy. Unfortunately, the outboard engine stopped functioning. Since the Sentinelese were shooting arrows in menacing fashion, to get out of the range of the arrows they had to make use of oars and fired a few rounds into the sky to scare the Sentinelese away. As soon as they heard the shots, the Sentinelese withdrew immediately.

The remaining gifts were placed on the beach on the second trip of the dinghy. On this occasion, the Sentinelese were watching the placing of gifts from a distance. After we had withdrawn from the shore, they came forward and picked up all the gifts happily. They swam into shallow water and were found celebrating their happiness. A third trip was made, but we did not land on the beach. The Sentinelese were standing under the shade of a tree along with children.

Two small canoes in good working condition were on the beach. In all eleven Sentinelese, including four children were seen. A total of 100 coconuts, six plastic buckets, six mugs, twenty-five dahs and a freshly caught fish were given as gifts on this occasion.

It was very surprising that the Sentinelese looked suspicious before the dinghy first landed. The shooting of arrows was also inexplicable. On the earlier occasion, their gestures showed that they welcomed the visits and were asking for more. During the 22 February visit, they had come out in a canoe to pick up the gifts thrown by us. All this had convinced us that they were eager to accept gifts from us, not hostile. However, this time, the reaction was a little different. There can be two reasons for this. The people whom we saw might belong to different family of Sentinelese, who were seeing us for the first time; or some unpleasant incident with poachers might have taken place since the last visit in May. The fact that there was no opposition to the second landing on the beach and the third trip of the dinghy to the sea-shore indicates that hostility had thawed.

T. N. Pandit

6 January 1983

The goodwill mission was led by Dr Bhupender Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The contact party landed ashore and placed gift articles like coconuts, dahs and sickles. Thirty-two Sentinelese were seen including men, women and children, but some of them were holding bows and arrows and were in an agitated mood, as the contact party observed.

T. N. Pandit

1 December 1985

We sailed from Port Blair on *M.V.Tarmugli* for North Sentinel Island to try and make contact with the Sentinelese. The members of the contact party on board consisted of Shyamji Krishna, Director, Tribal Welfare; Krishna Rao, D.S.P. Bush Police; Dr R. Lall, Director, Health Service; V.R.U. Menon, Executive Secretary, AAJVS; Bhaktawar Singh and Dr J.K. Sarkar, superintending anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India.

We sailed at 2230 hours along with the gifts usually taken by the AAJVS. This time there were 400 coconuts, about fifteen kg sweet potatoes and thirty adzes. These were packed separately in gunny bags and cloth. We reached near the southern shore of the island at about 0430 on 2 December. We were approaching from the eastern end of the island on the southern shore. A fire could be seen on the shore for some time, indicating the presence of the Sentinelese. At 0500 hours the boat anchored at a considerable distance from the shore to avoid any possibility of its being grounded. At about 0530 hours we saw eight individuals walking on the shore in a row from east to west. Because of the distance we could not identify their gender. Then our speed boat was floated. The gifts were loaded onto the speed boat. Except for the D.S.P. Bush Police, who was slightly indisposed, all of us boarded the boat, including four Bush policemen with rifles and shields. There were four crew to operate the speed boat. In total, we were thirteen persons. Our boat was moving from the east to the west side of the island. The eight Sentinelese who had been seen in the morning were not visible. The shore is not very wide, not more than twenty yards in breadth, and dense forest starts immediately beyond it. The distance between our boat and the shore was roughly 250 to 300 yards. After about half an hour we could see a hut on the shore, in front of which two outrigger canoes were visible. A portion of the thatch had new leaves. I was told that during the last visit on 5 November this hut was very small, and that now it had been made bigger. The hut was clearly visible, as it was on the shore and not inside the forest. The hut's thatch sloped towards the sea and it was open on all sides. The slope of the thatch touched the

ground. The canoe was a single log, the middle portion dug out, and the outrigger was clearly visible. After passing the hut we went further west for about fifteen minutes, covering about half a km. Then we turned back, and this time we could see three Sentinelese adult males coming out of the jungle and approaching us. It was immediately decided to place the gifts on the shore at the nearest spot. The number of Sentinelese started increasing. They were coming out of the forest behind the hut. Bhaktawar Singh, myself and two Bush policemen went ashore to leave the gifts. Five bags of coconuts, one packet of sweet potatoes and two packets of adzes were left. Before we could board the boat the Sentinelese started running up to take the gifts. The party members, particularly the crew members, were scared and we had to jump onto the boat which was quickly taken beyond arrow range. None of the Sentinelese had bows and arrows in their hands.

Two children came up first, and sat on the bags. The others reached within a few seconds. They saw us. One by one the bags were carried on their backs and kept nearby inside the jungle. Then all of them came out of the jungle. We counted their total number as twenty-four, of which four were children who appeared to be below ten years of age. One child was being carried on the back by a female. Five female adults and seven male adults could be identified. The sex of the remaining seven adults could not be identified, as they were standing at a distance. Meanwhile, one Sentinelese adult male came down to the water, and with his left hand gestured towards the east. The party members took this as an indication to drop gifts on that side. So we started moving towards the eastern side. When we passed the hut we saw that all the twenty-four persons had gone near the hut, some sitting down near it and others observing us.

We left three bags of coconut about half a km away from the hut. This time the Sentinelese did not run up but watched from a distance. After the bags were deposited, two children started running up. Three females carrying baskets on their backs, one carrying a child, and six adult males came to take the gifts. The bags were hoisted onto the back by three persons, and kept nearby in the forest. This time one of the adult males had a bow and arrows in his hand.

Keeping a safe distance, our boat again turned towards their hut. They followed us. The male holding the bow lifted it without stringing it, then went to the hut and kept the bow and arrow inside the thatch.

We started waving our hands. They reciprocated. Then we proceeded towards *Tarmugli*. We saw that two Sentinelese brought down one canoe to the sea and, with the help of two logs, floated it towards us. But after approaching for a few minutes, when they saw us returning, they took the canoe back to the shore.

From their activities, movements, and all indications, it appeared to

me that they did not regard us as enemies. They did not bring out their bows and arrows initially. Though one of them brought out a bow later, he never made any move to shoot. On the contrary, they waved their hands at us, and ran up to collect gifts. In fact, members of our speed boat were very scared, as incidents of shooting had occurred on earlier trips.

We returned to the boat by 0800 hours and left for Port Blair at 1500 hours on 2 December.

Jayanta Sarkar
Superintending Anthropologist.

27 December 1985

The contact party of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration for the Sentinelese left for North Sentinel island at 2230 hours. The contact party was led by the Honble Lt. Gov., Lt. Gen. (Retd.) T.S. Oberoi. Other members of the team were the Secretary, Tribal Welfare; the Superintendent of Police; Assistant Commissioner (TW Dept.) Bhaktawar Singh. The ADC to the Lt. Gov. also accompanied the party, along with Paras Ram, editor of a local newspaper, *Light of Andaman* and M. Verma, Correspondent, All India Radio. The team from the A & N Regional office of the Anthropological Survey of India, Port Blair, which joined the Contact Party, was led by Dr M.K. Raha, Deputy Director, and the Regional Officer; the other members being Dr D.C. Bhowmik, Assistant Anthropologist (P) and Dr R. Subbakrishna, Research Associate (Ling.). T.N. Pandit, Regional Officer, Eastern Region of Anthropological Survey of India, who was there at the time, also went.

The boat, *Tarmugli*, reached North Sentinel Island early the next day, at about 0515 hours and anchored a little away from the island inhabited by the Sentinelese. At about 0545 hours a team consisting of the Honble Lt. Gov.; his ADC; the Secretary, Tribal Welfare; the Superintendent of Police; the Assistant Commissioner (TW), Bhaktawar Singh; a few armed Bush policemen and Dr M.K.Raha approached the shore by a speed boat. Other members of the contact party, who could not join this team, remained on *Tarmugli*. The team sped to the shore to drop the gift articles, consisting of 400 coconuts and other items meant for the Sentinelese. They also hoped to catch a glimpse of the Sentinelese. The gifts were meant to help establish friendly relations with them.

As we moved closer to the shore, we noticed some five or six Sentinelese standing together and watching us. They did not show any interest, or move towards us, nor did they show any sign of hostility. As we reached the shore we dropped most of the articles a little way

from the water's edge, and waited a few minutes. The Sentinelese saw us dropping the gifts but did not move to collect them while we were there. They showed no sign of hostility. A little later, we got back in the speed boat and moved away from the shore. Seeing us moving away from the gifts, the Sentinelese rushed towards the gifts. Meanwhile, another group of some Sentinelese also appeared and ran towards the articles. We were watching them from a distance of about 100 ft. through binoculars. A total of twenty-six Sentinelese, of which thirteen were adult males, nine adult females and four children, gathered there to collect the gifts. Three of the four children were between six to ten years, and the fourth one about fifteen years of age. Two of the females were pregnant. Some of the males were quite tall, roughly about 5'8" and the females were about 5'4" or so. All were black or had very dark brown complexions with frizzly hair, and typically Negrito features. None of them was wearing any clothing, but the four males had on chest bands similar to, but narrower than, those used by the Jarawa. Two of them—one female and the fifteen-year-old boy—were carrying baskets on their backs slung over their foreheads by a strap. These baskets were elongated. One seemed to be made of cane, similar to the one used by the Jarawa. It was interesting and important that none of them were carrying any bows and arrows or spears. In the mean time we started throwing some coconuts into the water. Observing this, some of the adult males dived into the sea and started collecting the coconuts. An adult male and the boy of fifteen, meanwhile, rowed near our boat in a canoe with the aim of collecting coconuts, which they did. During this period they came very close to our speed boat, always keeping a distance of about twenty-five ft.

When their collection was over, we continued to watch one another. After some time, the adult male in the boat took out a knife and showed it to us. Considering it a sign indicating that we should leave, we started moving towards *Tarmugli*. It may be mentioned here that for the first time we saw such a good number of the Sentinelese in a group. Another important thing was that the children and the pregnant women were proof that their powers of reproduction were healthy. The crude canoe and the baskets indicated that their material culture was not highly developed.

Further, the last time we visited them we saw one thatched hut on the shore. This time we marked that some extension had been made to that hut but the older portion was dilapidated. They had not cared to rethatch the older portion. Another interesting point we marked was that when we called out and waved our hands at them, they also reciprocated. Some of the adult males and females, as also the children, were laughing, and expressing their happiness at the gifts. They were seen to talk amongst themselves, possibly regarding the coconuts we gave

them. We could not spot a single coconut tree as far as we could see on the island. But the Sentinelese accepted the gifts well. They showed no sign of hostility. On the contary, their gestures were apparently friendly.

We returned to *Tarmugli* by 0815 hours and started sailing towards Port Blair at about 0845. We reached Port Blair at about 1630 hours on 28 December 1985.

M. K. Raha
Deputy Director

11 February 1987

On 11 February at 2030 hours the members of the contact party for the Sentinelese and the Jarawa left Port Blair by *M.V. Tarmugli*. This time Lt. Gen. (Retd.) T.S. Oberoi joined the party. Abdulla Kutti, Councillor, A & N Islands and T.K. Ghosh of the press joined the party as guests. The Secretary, Tourism; the D.C. Andaman; the superintendent of police; and security personnel of the Lt. Governor, were also on board the ship. Among the regular members of the contact party were the following : Bhaktawar Singh, Dy. S.P. (Retd.), Bush Police; R.K. Bhatia, Deputy Director, Census Operation; V.R.U. Menon, Executive Secretary, AAJVS; J. Shukla, senior male nurse and Dr J.K. Sarkar, Superintending Anthropologist, ASI.

Besides, there were four persons who also accompanied us to prepare a documentary film on the visit to the Sentinelese and Jarawa. At about 0530 hours on 12 February, the ship reached near North Sentinel Island. From a distance no Sentinelese could be seen on the shore. Two life boats from the ship were floated. At about 0630 hours we could see the movement of a small outrigger canoe of the Sentinelese. Then the movements of three Sentinelese could be seen on shore. On seeing them it was decided to move towards the shore with gifts like coconuts and iron choppers or daos. The Lt. Gov., the S.P., Secretary Tourism, three security personnel with firearms, Bhaktawar Singh, R.K. Bhatia, J. Shukla, Abdulla Kutti, Ghosh and myself got into one boat while the other members, along with the movie crew, prepared to follow us with the camera. The sea bed near the shore is full of coral of different sizes, which makes it difficult to row directly.

Approaching the shore we could not see the Sentinelese anywhere. The forest is so dense that the black-complexioned Sentinelese can hide themselves easily. All of us remained alert. On reaching the shore, the Lt. Gov. went down to the beach. His security guard followed him. Bhaktawar Singh, Kutti, Ghosh and myself alighted. A gunny bag full about 100 coconuts was placed on the shore, as well as a bundle of iron choppers. We walked about on shore for about five minutes and then

came back to the boat. From a distance I could see about ten or fifteen Sentinelese moving in the forest at a distance of hardly twenty to twenty-five metres from the place where we had dropped the coconuts. We were much within their shooting range, but they did nothing. They appeared to be observing our activities, while hiding themselves in the dense forest. When we were at a distance, two of them came out but did not run for the gifts left on the shore.

Then we proceeded towards the west to drop some more coconuts on the shore. After about fifteen minutes we reached near an old hut which I had seen as a newly constructed one in December 1985. This time the Lt. Gov., his three security personnel, Bhaktawar Singh and myself went ashore. A bag of coconuts was kept on the beach. In the mean time we could see three Sentinelese approaching us from the eastern side. They did not seem to have bows and arrows. Immediately we requested the Lt. Gov. to return to the boat. He asked us to board the boat instead but we could not leave him on the shore and go to the boat. Suddenly one Sentinelese started running towards us and another came out of the forest with a bow and arrows. All of us rushed towards the boat. The man with the bow unleashed an arrow which dropped at a distance from us. It appeared to me as some sort of warning, since we were within the range of the arrow and he could have shot us if he had wanted to. A few other Sentinelese came out of the forest. This created a panic among the newcomers and as the Lt. Gov. was now on the boat, one of the guards fired in the air for his security. By this time our boat was at a distance from the shore. Even then the same Sentinelese came down to the water, collected the arrow earlier unleashed, and this time with the definite intention of hitting us, took his time to aim before shooting the arrow. It came towards us in a parabolic curve and dropped into the water just inches away from the hand of one of the security guards. It had a trident head of iron, the shaft was of cane and it was about three and a half ft. long. The entire expedition was documented by the film crew. The shooting of firearms and the subsequent shooting of arrows were the main points of discussion. However, the Lt. Gov. wanted some more gifts to be dropped at some other place and accordingly we started moving east. I could see the Sentinelese take the bag of coconuts towards the old hut. After keeping it there they started following us along the shore. By this time about twenty-seven to twenty-eight individuals in a row could be seen following the progress of our boat slowly along the shore. At the place where we first dropped the coconuts one female with a basket on her back could be seen dancing, clapping her palms on the thigh in a similar fashion to the Jarawa women. This was interesting to note.

While approaching Senari Point in the east I could see more than two small huts, apparently new, under big trees. There was an outrigger

canoe on the shore. When we reached Senari Point we could not see the Sentinelese any more, as at one spot the forest came right down to the sea and approach by shore was not possible.

At Senari Point a second bag of coconuts was dropped off, and after spending about five minutes or so there, we got back in the boat. We then returned to the main boat by about 1000 hours. As on every trip, this time too we were trying to analyze the behaviour of the tribe. The most important question was why the Sentinelese had shot an arrow? Bhaktawar Singh opined that perhaps we had stayed a little longer on shore than we usually do. I shared this view. Usually, after dropping the gifts, we return to the boat immediately. The Sentinelese must have observed this routine. But this time, even on seeing them approach, the party did not run away. Perhaps this caused them to send us a warning by first unleashing an arrow. The shooting of a firearm by the security guard, which followed, obviously provoked them to shoot again for their defence. This shooting in the air may cause a setback for the contact party on their next visit to establish friendly contact. Normally, we go near the shore in one boat; this time there were two boats, which may have also created some suspicion; and lastly, the contact party had gone to Sentinelese Island to drop gifts after a gap of ten months, which broke the regular continuity of visits through which some sort of acquaintance was expected to have developed.

Jayanta Sarkar

27 May 1987

A contact party boarded the vessel *MV Tarmugli* at 2300 hours on 27 May to visit North Sentinel Island. Besides Dr R. Subbakrishna, RA (Ling) and P.C. Coomar, STA (C) from the Survey, the party consisted of V. R. U. Menon, Executive Secretary, AAJVS; Farooqui, Superintendent of Police (Bush Police) with his wife and children; Bhaktawar Singh, DSP Bush Police (Retd); and Naresh Kumar, DSP Bush Police. Kaushik Gupta, Amitabh Chakravarty, Sashikanth and Sharma of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) were also on board.

The vessel reached the vicinity of North Sentinel Island at 0500 hours and was anchored off shore. A lifeboat was lowered from *MV Tarmugli*, gift articles were put into it, and the party climbed in and set off for the shore. The gift articles included coconut and citrus saplings, and bags of coconuts. On reaching the shore some of the members including myself got down and planted the saplings. The planting was done quickly with Bush policemen protecting us with shields and guns. There was a deserted hut near this spot. After the planting, the party left for another place, a sandy beach. Here three bags of coconuts were left

on the shore and we spent a few minutes on shore with, of course, the Bush policemen on the lookout around us. The party got back in the boat, disappointed because there was no sign of the Sentinelese. We then decided to spend some more time wandering along the shore of the island, hoping to attract the attention of the tribes around there. Their huts were visible from a distance, built on the shore, but of course beyond the reach of even high waves. One of them was new. One behind the other when seen from the boat, the huts were side by side if viewed from their point of entry. Soon six male Sentinelese suddenly appeared on the shore with bows and a set of arrows each in their hands. They are, perhaps, used to the landing of the contact party around there, for they were trying to communicate something which was unintelligible, partly due to the safe distance we were maintaining. After some time, some rapport was established. Both parties understood that we wanted each other to reach the sandy beach where the gifts were. The party in the boat, and the Sentinelese along the shore on foot, headed towards the beach. As the Sentinelese reached the bags of coconuts, the boat crew were cautioned not to go too close to shore and the boat remained off shore, maintaining a safe distance. The six Sentinelese were visibly unhappy with the three bags of gifts, and kept looking around for more. When they could not find any, they sat down, disappointed, while two of them entered the water. The party showed an intention to land by taking the boat towards the shore by a few yards; only to beat an immediate retreat as a Sentinelese came forward, drawing his bow, with his lengthy arrow aiming at the boat. Making friendly gestures, we left to do another round of the shore before finally returning to the vessel. On the way we again sighted about thirteen Sentinelese, a group consisting of males, females and children. They were moving along the shore, probably to join the earlier party. They were counted from a distance, through the binoculars. As we moved towards the shore to show gestures of friendship they went behind a bush and were not visible for some time. Then they were seen coming out of their hideout and moving towards the earlier party after our boat went towards *MV Tarmugli*. When the group of Sentinelese were visible again the contact party made some gestures of farewell from the moving boat. The INTACH party reported that the figures of the Sentinelese had remained unclear because of the distance maintained throughout.

The contact party left the shores of North Sentinel Island at 1100 hours on 28 May and reached Port Blair at 1800 hours.

R. Subbakrishna

9 February 1988

We started on *MV Tarmugli* for North Sentinel Island at 2200 hours along with the members of the Sentinelese Contact Party of A & N Administration. The purpose was to make friendly contact with the Sentinelese. Besides Dr M. K. Raha, Deputy Director and Dr B. K. Das, STA (C) of the Anthropological Survey of India, the contact party consisted of V.R.U. Menon, Executive Secretary, AAJVS; Dr R. Lal, Medical Officer; R. Titkare, DSP; and Bhaktawar Singh, DSP (Retd.).

Next morning at 0600 hours the vessel reached the vicinity of North Sentinel Island and anchored a little off the shore. We watched the island through binoculars and could trace four Sentinelese on the shore near the middle of the south coast of North Sentinel Island. This was confirmed by some others. The island is about ten to twelve km in length in a east-west direction, covered with dense forest. At 0730 hours we approached the shore by speed boat with some gift articles consisting of eleven bags of coconuts and some pieces of iron in a packet. Armed Bush policemen accompanied us. When our boat came close to the shore around the middle of the island we saw some Sentinelese coming out of the forest. There were fourteen in number, of which two were children and two were women. None of them was armed. Seeing them there our speed boat started towards the west coast. The group of Sentinelese followed us through the jungle. On reaching the shore on the west coast we got down and dropped the gift articles on the sandy beach. We spent about five minutes on the shore with, of course, surveillance by armed Bush policemen. Then we got into the boat and watched the Sentinelese from a safe distance.After about fifteen minutes we saw the group rushing towards the gift articles we had left on the shore. They seemed joyous and cheerful on getting the gifts. Three to four adult male Sentinelese reached first and started dragging the bags up the beach to the other side of the bush. The others waited under the shadow of the bush, perhaps to protect themselves from the scorching sun or to watch our activities. We expressed our friendliness through gestures, and in return they repeated the gestures. We called out to them to come to us, and they also called to us to go to them, all through gestures. Simultaneously our search for the other Sentinelese continued from the boat which was moving at a very slow speed, maintaining a short distance from the shore. We found another group of seven adult male members with their bows and arrows, followed by six others of which two were children.After a very brief halt they all went inside the forest. Thus, on this visit we saw twenty-seven Sentinelese: four children, two women and twenty-one adult males. Some of them had waist guards made of bark about four to five inches wide. Some had baskets and buckets on their backs. Seeing this favourable situation,

some members of the contact party decided to present more gift articles. We came back to *MV Tarmugli* and took eighteen more bags of coconuts and started towards the shore again. This time, we decided to go to Senari Point, the eastern-most part of the island, maintaining a short distance off the shore. Near the middle of the shore we found an abandoned outrigger canoe on the sandy beach. It was about fourteen feet in length with five or six outriggers for balancing. The canoe was dug out from a tree trunk and did not show any fine workmanship. After some time we reached Senari Point. We got down and dropped sixteen bags of coconuts on the beach at one spot, which was easily visible to the Sentinelese from a distance.We loitered on the sandy beach for about fifteen minutes while the Bush policemen mounted surveillance around us. Then we got into the boat again and, maintaining a safe distance, moved along the shore of the island from east to west to attract the attention of the Sentinelese around there. After a while, we noticed a canoe coming towards us from the east. As our boat was proceeding towards the west, we reached the vicinity of the canoe soon; but it suddenly disappeared. Then we saw an adult male on a rock on the shore. He was clapping his hands and calling to us with gestures. We requested him to come, and made friendly gestures. Both of us wanted to approach closer with friendly gestures, but could not. Meanwhile, the canoe which had been hiding in the creeks behind the rocks, came out. There were three adult males in the canoe, one of whom was rowing the canoe with the help of a big bamboo-like log. The man who was rowing had on a red waist guard while the other two had light-brown waist guards. The canoe came forward a little, but as soon as our boat followed it and moved towards them, they directed the canoe back and went behind the rocks again. At this point, we threw the remaining two bags of coconuts into the sea and requested them to take them. The friendly Sentinelese who was on the rock dived into the sea and got the canoe. They came forward together and collected the bags and also picked up an arrow from the sea which had, perhaps, been thrown earlier while fishing. The arrow was about five ft. in length. Its iron point was needle-like and about a foot in length, with a hook near the working end. In the canoe there was also a bucket. In response to our friendly gestures, they were trying to communicate something which was not clear to us; but from their cheerful gestures it was clear that they were happy with the gift articles. However, as we moved towards them and also towards the shore, they hid their canoe again. During all this a group of the Sentinelese was seen collecting the gift articles dropped at Senari Point.While our friendly gestures continued, one of the Sentinelese on the canoe started dancing with an adze in his hand. The adze is about one and a half feet in length. The iron blade of the adze is fixed at a right angle to the handle and tied with thread.

After making more friendly gestures our boat left for another round along the shore before finally returning to *MV Tarmugli*. On our way we again found a group of the Sentinelese with gift bags. The contact party made some farewell gestures from the moving speed boat. The contact party left North Sentinel Island at 1115 hours on 10 February 1988 and reached Port Blair at 1800 hours.

B. K. Das
M. K. Raha

23 March 1988

A contact party of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration, consisting of N. Diwakar, Secretary, Tribal welfare; M.A.J. Farouqui, Superintendent of Police; Dr Jayaram, Medical Officer; V.R.U. Menon, Executive Secretary AAJVS; Ravi Mallick, Secretary to the Lt. Gov., Bhaktawar Singh and I started for Sentinelese Island at about 2200 hours, by *M V Tarmugli*, on 22 March 1988.

On 23 March at about 0630 hours *M V Tarmugli* anchored near North Sentinel Island. From there we started for the western tip of North Sentinel Island at about 0900 hours. On the shore near the western tip the members of the Contact Party left bags of coconuts as a gift. Dr Raha, on behalf of ASI, also left gift articles like a mirror, a red ribbon, rubber balls, bead necklaces and so on. We stayed there for some time and then left for the eastern tip. On the way we saw that some coconut plants which had been planted last year had grown. We saw a group of about twenty Sentinelese including men, women and children waiting under the bush. We dropped bags of coconuts as a sign of friendship, but the Sentinelese showed no sign of collecting the gifts. We set off for the west coast. One Sentinelese came up to where the gifts were left, but as soon as we reached the spot, the Sentinelese disappeared into the forest on seeing us approaching them. But after some time four of them came and started picking up the gifts. They also took the various gift articles. Then we went closer to the shore and left some more bags of coconuts. Seeing this, the Sentinelese started laughing and came towards us on the west coast, as close as ten yards. They waved their hands, as a gesture of friendliness. All the Sentinelese took the gifts and expressed their joy through gestures. We reciprocated in kind. After some time we returned to *M V Tarmugli* and came back to Port Blair in the evening.

M. K. Raha

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Anthropology

The Sentinelese

T.N. Pandit

Of all the tribal societies in India the Sentinelese whose population is estimated at 80 to 100, are perhaps the most isolated and hence the most untouched culturally and biologically. They are true hunter–gatherers who live on the small island of North Sentinel, from which they derive their name. It has been possible to record some observations of their physical type, lifestyle and culture. T.N. Pandit was the first professional anthropologist to land there, in March 1967. He made important observations on their settlement pattern and material culture. Subsequently, he has made many more visits to these people between 1974 and 1989. The present volume is a personalized account by T.N. Pandit, a first-hand study of his observations and experience, based on his visits to the Sentinelese.

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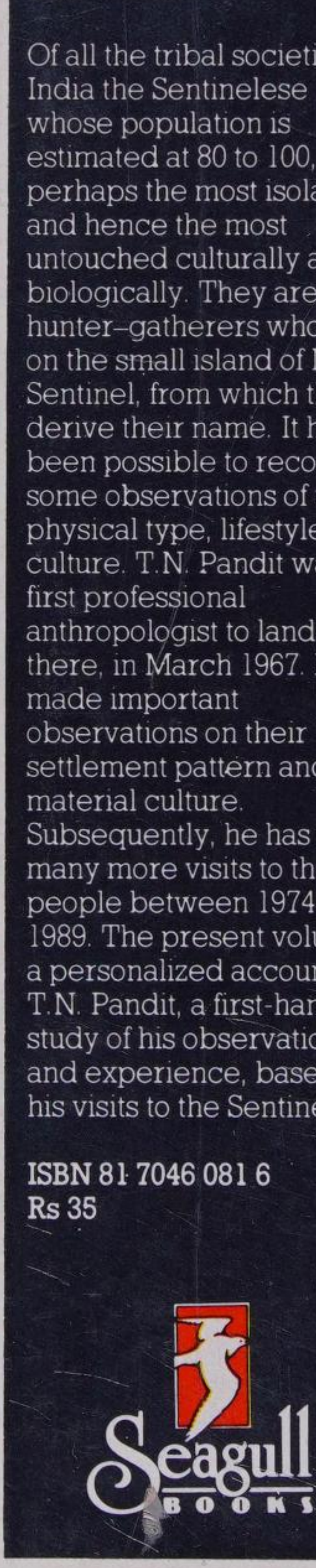

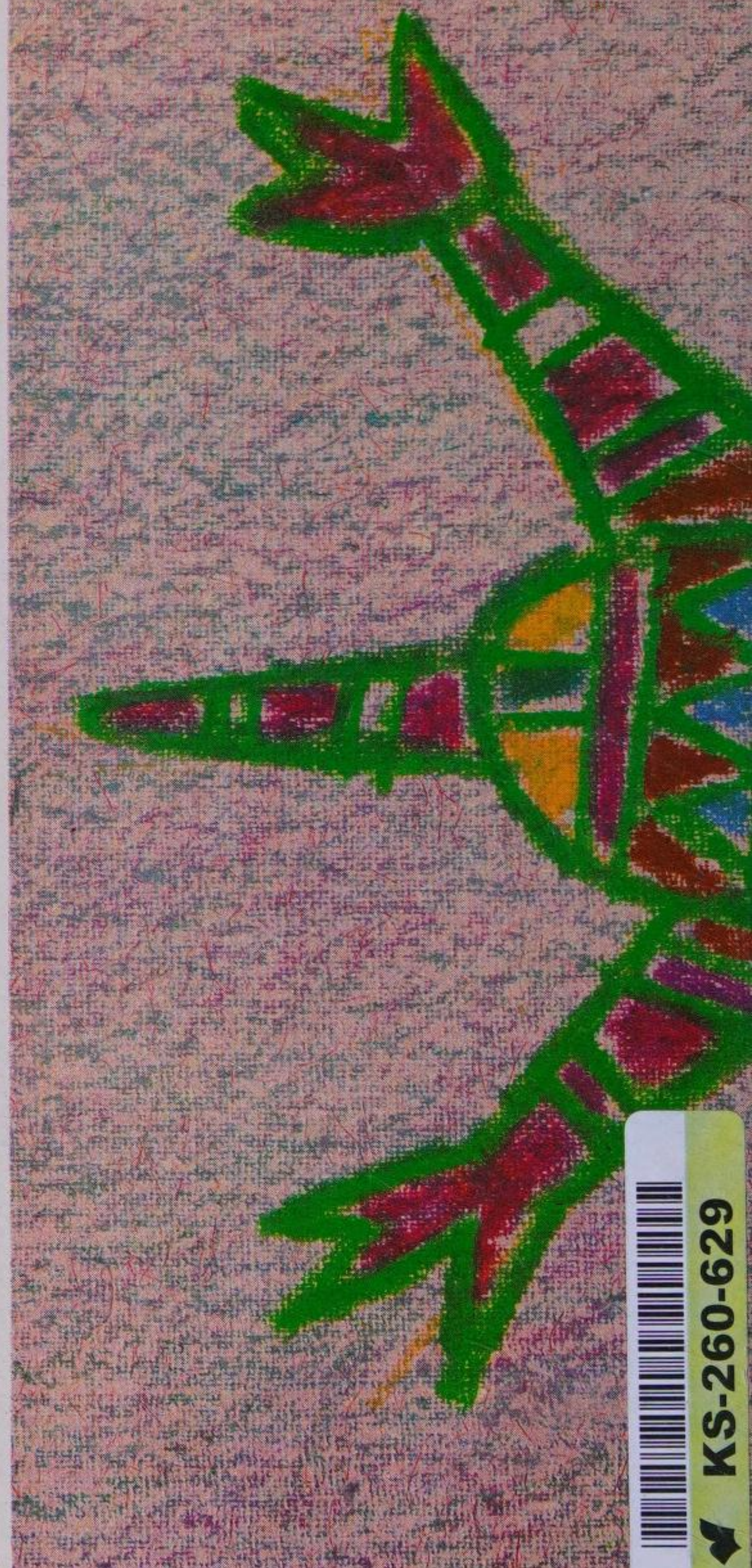

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